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Title Poetic Values

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POETIC VALUES

A Guide to the Appreciation of
THE GOLDEN TREASURY

By

E. A. GREENING LAMBORN

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*Boni venatoris est aliquid
capere, non omnia*

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PREFACE

WHEN Dr. Johnson said that notes were a necessary evil he meant those explanations of the meaning of obscure or archaic words, of allusive passages, and biographical or historical details which until yesterday were the staple of the annotated edition.

Such notes are still an evil, but they are no longer a necessary one: there are dictionaries, English, classical, and biographical, to which the reader of poetry can refer as he personally feels the need; for,

No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en—
In brief, sir, study what you most affect

To know the exact geographical position of Innisfree and the precise distinction of salley gardens is not necessary to the full enjoyment of Mr. Yeats's most lovely poems. These facts, indeed, might even lessen our pleasure. I remember my own dismay and regret when I learned, late in life, the truth about Leah's 'tender eyes'. I had thought of her as an Agnes neglected for a Dora, and had associated her with the description in the Song of Solomon, 'Behold, thou art fair, my Love, thou hast dove's eyes'. The pathos of her situation was a very moving and precious thing to me. And then, in a marginal note, I found that 'tender' meant 'sore'.

But here the truth, if it shattered one vision, supplied another no less tragic. Too often the effect of a note is to check our emotional reaction to a poem by presenting it in a matter-of-fact, everyday aspect. For commonly the annotator's point of view is that of the late Mr. Gradgrind: 'facts alone are wanted'. But what the reader of

poetry really wants is not the fact alone, but the poet's impression of it, he needs to feel about it as the poet felt and to share his vision of it. He can do that only through the poet's expression any other form of words will communicate merely the annotator's sense of the fact. And the poet's expression is not merely the words as symbols but as sounds. 'Do you call *that* poetry?' asked Sir Edward Clarke in cross-examining Wilde. 'Not as you read it,' was the quiet reply. Poetry is only poetry when its music 'compels us to feel what we perceive'. Unless we hear aright we shall neither see nor feel aright, we shall share neither the poet's vision nor his emotion; we shall indeed come nearer to sharing both through the music alone than through the symbols alone. It is vain therefore to ask of a poetical expression, 'What does it mean?' for no other form of words means the same. 'How do you do?' may be practically equivalent to 'How are you?', though even there most of us would select one or the other according to our company, but the effect of

How can it, oh, how can Love's eye be true?

or

How like a winter hath my absence been!

can be produced by no paraphrase of the mere words. To change the form is to lose the meaning; it is like reducing the diamond to its original carbon: the chemical substance is the same, but the beauty that gave it power over men has ceased to exist.

Poetry is the world made by the singer for the dreamer, conjured up by the word of enchantment, by 'mouthings of magic for charm', visible only to those on whom has fallen the spell of 'the incantation of this verse'.

The first service of the commentator, therefore, is to help the reader to see through the ear by repro-

ducing the sound-effects intended by the poet. Here he is faced by a fundamental difficulty: that of communicating impressions of sound by means of print. In the far-off days when poetry was a popular enjoyment, before the schools and broadcasting had destroyed our natural delight in it, all written symbols were translated into sound, all reading was oral, and most verse was communicated by means of speech, as nursery rhymes are still. Then a poet, and those who quoted him, could be reasonably sure that those who read his verse would hear his music; actors and public reciters alone seem to have been exceptions then as now, since both Chaucer and Shakespeare found it necessary to appeal to them to 'speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue'. They have never done so; Miss Thorn-dike wins applause by rendering the dying speech of Katharine in the quavering accents of a real old woman, and Miss Fay Compton by making Juliet talk like a modern flapper. But if Shakespeare had meant to give us 'real' persons he would not have made them speak in verse at all. What he and every artist seeks to give us is not a piece of the real world, but a vision of an ideal one in which even dying women like Katharine, and even mad old men like Lear, speak not merely noble things but noble music, far beyond the common utterance of men. Just as no verse can bear translation without losing its sweetness and harmony, so no verse can bear to be spoken as 'real' speech without losing its beauty and its true emotional power, for, as Stevenson said, 'no verse can ever sound otherwise than trivial when uttered with the delivery of prose'.

Yet this substitution for Shakespeare's music is broadcast to millions, and imitated in the schools. The result is that no writer quoting an exquisite

line can be sure that those who read it will recognize its musical beauty. And a man who cannot hear for himself that

Poppy nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,

or

The brown, bright nightingale, amorous,

or

Mithras, God of the Morning, our trumpets waken
the wall,

are exquisite in their verbal melody, can be helped, if at all, only by hearing them from the living voice. Until then it is useless to talk to him of the effects of alliteration, echoes, and open vowels; still more useless to thrust upon him a matter-of-fact explanation of 'mandragora' and 'Mithras'.

But uninstructed readers may find a measure of delight in verbal music without appreciating its full beauty; that can only be done by those who have learned to listen not merely for the music but for its significance. For every beautiful line is both beautiful in its sound and beautiful also in the fitness of its music to its theme. It is here that one lover of poetry can help another.

The tiro may discover for himself such directly imitative effects as

Strong gongs groaning as the guns boom far,

or

I bubble on the pebbles;

but without help he may never go on to appreciate the far more subtle artistry of musical contrast, mood-melody and, above all, suggestive rhythm. He will miss alike the correspondence and the contrast of music and images in

the Severn strong
A-rolling on rough water brown
Light aspen leaves along—

unless it is pointed out that the alliteration of *r* in the first lines suggests the force of the current, while the weak *l*'s and *s*'s of the last line correspond with the lightness of the leaves. So he will lose the full impressiveness of Milton's heaven and hell if he is not led to notice the significance of the musical contrast in the passages in which the opening of their gates is described:

On a sudden open fly,
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,
The infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder.

But

Heav'n open'd wide
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound
Of golden hinges moving.

Even when he has learned to listen for suggestiveness of melody, the still more subtle suggestion of rhythm may often elude him, so that without a guide he may fail to appreciate the exquisite rhythmical rightness of

The current, that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou know'st, being stopt, impatiently doth rage,

in which, if we read it rightly, we feel the smooth-flowing current of the first line suddenly checked and violently agitated in the second.

It is, moreover, the business of the commentator not merely to call attention to these effects but, so far as they are explicable, to explain the technique which produces them. For a large part of poetry, as of all the arts, is technical skill which not only can but must be understood by those who wish for more than an elementary enjoyment. Thus in my last quotation the suggestive check in the rhythm is effected by means of the doubled consonants in *know'st* and *stopt*, while the sense of hurry and agitation in the concluding phrase is

due to the free-running vowels of *impatiently doth rage*.

Since, as Paracelsus wrote, it is necessary to know evil as well as good—for how shall a man know what is good but by comparison with evil?—the critic of poetry can help the student by calling his attention to that discrepancy between the sound and the sense which is the first and most fatal characteristic of bad verse. For examples the hymn-books are the readiest source:

My Jesus to know, and to feel His Blood flow,
'Tis life everlasting, 'tis heaven below;

the rhythm is identical with that of

Come, Jenny and Joe, to the fair let us go,
To lively jazz music we'll turn on the toe.

The reader may think himself shocked by my levity, really his shock is due to the sudden realization, brought home to him by the rhythm, of the worthlessness of the thought, his subconscious revolt is against the use of a jiggling rhythm in association with a sacred theme, it is as if a man should go to Mass in motley. To understand how bad these lines are we need only compare them with the music of

My blood so red
For thee was shed;
Come home again, come home again,
My own Sweet heart come home again;
You've gone astray
Out of your way—
Come home again, come home again

Palgrave was capable of strange lapses of judgment, and, paradoxically, one of the merits of his collection is the inclusion of various specimens of inferior verse which afford similarly illuminative contrasts.

If music is the first essential of poetry, vision is the second (though these two are really one and

indivisible). The universe exists for all to see; yet as

Two men looked out through prison bars,
One saw the mud, the other the stars,

so the artist sees an aspect of things which the common man would never unaided perceive for himself; and so, too, the long-devoted lover of poetry will see things in the poet's expression which the inexperienced would overlook. The supreme illustration of this service of the critical student is Ruskin's commentary on some lines of *Lycidas* in *Sesame and Lilies*; the revelation of the wealth of meaning concentrated in 'blind mouths', for example, is in its way as marvellous as the phrase itself, for it illuminates at once the service of poetry and of criticism to the human spirit—which is 'to rouse, to startle it, into a life of constant and eager observation' so that we may see alike in life and in poetry 'all that is to be seen in it by the finest senses'.

Thus to reveal the full implications of figurative language is a service only second in importance to helping the reader to appreciate the beauty and the significance of verbal music. Beside these two all other functions of poetical criticism are but minor matters; the most useful, perhaps, is to ensure that the appropriateness and pictorial force of the poet's epithets shall be properly realized, to call attention, for example, to Shakespeare's inspired choice of the words used to describe Sylvia;

Holy, fair, and wise is she:

three words of four letters, and we know her body, mind, and spirit, Shakespeare has thought of all three, and has remembered the gift most excellent for each—beauty of outward form, wisdom for the mind, purity of soul. There is significance even in the order of those epithets: holiness comes first;

but Shakespeare knew that beauty ranks before intellectual gifts in the feminine scale of values.

I had known and loved Sylvia and her creator for long years before the full beauty of this description dawned upon me; and as Stevenson said that he wished there had been some one in his youth to 'put him in good heart about life', so I wish there had been some one to reveal to me that such felicities awaited discovery and were the reward of the trained seeker. For though it is true, in poetry as in life, that 'no man may deliver his brother', that each must work out his own salvation, yet Nietzsche's challenge, 'Here, now, is *my* way: where is thine?' may be a stimulus and an inspiration.

These notes represent my way of looking at the poems in the *Golden Treasury*. I neither expect nor wish that my readers' sense of values should everywhere agree with my own; but I do hope and believe that every one may be led to see and hear some things that he had failed to notice, and, since one discovery of this kind leads to another, that he will thus be helped to the keener pleasure of finding for himself beauties that I have missed. For 'all high poetry is infinite. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight'.

Nevertheless it is too much to say with Mr. G. M. Trevelyan that 'one's own judgement of poetry is the only one worth having, not because it is necessarily right but because it alone is strongly

felt'. That is true only when our judgement is based upon and fortified by a knowledge of technique; it is not enough to like a thing: we ought to know why it is worth liking. 'In France (as its greatest critic said), the first consideration for us is not whether we are amused and pleased by a work of art, nor is it whether we are touched by it. What we seek above all to learn is *whether we were right* in being amused with it, and in applauding it, and in being moved by it.' Criticism, like history, is personal, but personal pleading, not personal prejudice.

As I have usually been careful to support my judgement by reasons, it is for those who disagree with the first to refute the last, and similarly to find reasons to justify their own opinion, thus, whether right or wrong in my own views, I shall equally be fulfilling my purpose in this book by causing my readers to define and clarify theirs. I would point out, however, that as the book is intended as a *guide* to the *Golden Treasury*, much of the one is meaningless apart from the other; it can be used to good purpose only when the two books are open side by side, and, even then, only by a reader who has first taken the trouble to study for himself the poem under consideration, before referring to my remarks upon it. Then, having formed some critical opinions of his own, he can turn to my book and say, as it says to him, 'Here, now, is my way: where is thine?'

E. A. G. L.

LITTLEMORE,
May Day 1928.

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Note.—The numbers refer to the World's Classics
Edition of the 'Golden Treasury'.

★

THE GOLDEN TREASURY

1 *Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant king;*

SUBJECT and spirit are both representative of our early poetry. In the Middle Ages comfort depended very much upon the weather, winter was a cheerless season of monotony in food, toil in cold and damp, darkness and overcrowding indoors. Even to-day we rejoice at the return of spring, but then it was hailed with rapture as in this poem. There is here no trace of reflection, only a succession of pleasant images; the poet hunts rhyme after rhyme with the delight of a child.

Then as now the notes of the cuckoo, nightingale, and thrush most naturally suggest themselves for imitation.

Jug rhymes not with 'mug' but, throatily, with the first syllable of sugar.

2 *Phoebus, arise!*

SHOWS more love of poetry than power to produce it. Most of the personification is secondhand from Greek mythology, though 'Night like a drunkard reels' can only be Shakespeare's (*Romeo and Juliet*, II. III. 3). The alternating long and short lines are intended to give variety to the music, which is nevertheless somewhat monotonous. The note of rapture seems throughout forced.

3 *When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced*

4 *Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,*

To whom and in what circumstances Shakespeare wrote his sonnets is a problem upon which, in the present state of our knowledge, no wise man will pronounce an opinion. It may, however, be safely

affirmed that, like the relationship revealed in them, they are characteristic products of the Renaissance. Their form is a corruption of an Italian model, and their spirit is essentially pagan. The key-note, here struck, is that of Ovid's 'mors etiam saxa nominibus venit', and his 'tempus edax rerum', almost certainly a part of that 'small Latin' which Shakespeare learnt at school, and which his experience of life was now making significant for him. Line 10 of No. 3 is probably a recollection of an image in Ovid, 'the very ruins are gone to ruin'. The thought throughout is commonplace enough, but the language goes far to justify Pope's admiration for 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed'.

5 Come live with me and be my Love,

POETRY 'spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things'. Marlowe here, as almost always, creates for us an imaginary world; Shakespeare reveals the mystery of the real one.

The marked alliteration of *l*, the most liquid of the consonants, and of *m*, also a musical sound, helps to explain the lovely melody of the lines.

7 Under the greenwood tree

8 It was a lover and his lass

IN these perfect songs, as Scott said of his song *County Guy*, 'The words have not so much sense, wit, or fancy as to withdraw the attention from the music . . . for the lines are intended not to be said or read but only to be sung'. The deeper note in No. 8 is only lightly touched. In No. 319 it becomes the key-note, and then we have not a song but the most melancholy poetry in English literature.

10 *Being your slave, what should I do but tend*

THE mood of utter despondency is suggested in the slow dragging movement due to the placing of the long vowels. All church-going England knew the prayer-book phrase 'world without end', but only a Shakespeare could so consummately apply it.

11 *How like a winter hath my absence been*

ILLUSTRATES the profound truth, which he has elsewhere expressed, that 'there is neither good nor bad, but thinking makes it so', which Milton puts even more finely,

'the mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven'.

12 *When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes*

A STUDY in musical contrast. The opening lines, and especially the second, which clogged by its grouped consonants is as slow-footed as Despair itself, move heavily like the thought. But the short vowels of the tenth line reflect the change of mood, and the natural pauses after *like*, *lark*, *day*, and *arising* make little runs in the rhythm suggestive of the rising movements of the bird's flight.

13 *O never say that I was false of heart,*

'PREPOSTEROUSLY' in line 11 is a fine illustration of the verbal harmony that results from the judicious blending of Latin with Anglo-Saxon words.

14 *To me, fair Friend, you never can be old,*

'EVERY word in him is a picture' (Gray). Here he makes the passing of time visible. But Dryden was a more acute critic than Gray 'When he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel

it too.' Sight, smell, and touch are all imaginatively stimulated by the suggestive power of the seventh line. The unpleasant sound of *eye I eyed* suggests that pronunciation must have changed.

15 *Diaphena like the daffadowndilly,*

THE second stanza perhaps suggested to Tennyson the wonderful hyperbole in the last stanza of No. 334. But while Constable's light tone tells us he does not expect to be believed, Tennyson's passionate intensity compels us to believe not only in his sincerity but in the miracle itself.

That the bees have no king is as true and as irrelevant as that the fairies have no queen.

16 *Like to the clear in highest sphere*

THE metaphors and similes are pretty enough, but not beyond the reach of a poetical schoolboy; the resemblance between eyes and sapphires is as easily thought of as it is instantly visualized. But turn the leaf and see how Shakespeare uses his profound imaginative insight to excite our own by asking 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' Who would have thought of it? And who, now, has done thinking of all the outward and inward loveliness that it implies? The single simile of Lodge that is not obvious—the neck like a tower from which Love, imprisoned, looks out to get sight of her eyes—is one of those 'far-fetched conceits which are seldom worth the carriage'. Palgrave in comparing the poem to contemporary Italian portraits strangely forgets that a great painter, unlike Lodge, does more than record appearances. With this pagan picture of fleshly beauty should be contrasted the spiritualized loveliness of Rossetti's *Blessed Damsel*, No. 379.

19 *When in the chronicle of wasted time*

20 *On a day, alack the day!*

21 *Forget not yet the tried intent*

THREE poems illustrating splendid rhetoric, light persiflage, and the simple sincerity of true and noble poetry. We are moved but not convinced by the eloquence of the first; we recognize with tepid approval the grace of the second; but the pathos of the third goes straight to our hearts, its rhythm carrying it unchallenged past our critical guard. Its touch is so sure that we feel almost ashamed to look for an explanation of its power, and though we note the pleading effect of repetition, the force gained by the employment of monosyllables, and the sense of effort and earnestness that results from the necessity to enunciate clearly the numerous dentals, we feel that these things do not fully account for the effect upon us.

23 *Let me not to the marriage of true minds*

P E R H A P S the most moving love-poem in the language, certainly there is none of equal length to compare with it in the impressiveness of its figures. *Impediments* recalls Shakespeare's familiarity with the Prayer Book, lines 7 and 8 his knowledge of astrology: the star's *worth* was its influence; its *height* its place in the heavens.

26 *O Mistress mine, where are you roaming?*

ANOTHER perfect song, expressing a genuine feeling yet not one too deep for musical accompaniment—for there is something unreal and unnatural in *singing* our deeper feelings; which helps to explain why cathedral singers are often infidels, and why so many opera stars pass through the divorce court. The hidden alliteration of *r*, *l*, and *s* throughout is delightfully subtle.

27 *When icicles hang by the wall*

ART is the selection from among infinite details of those which will most powerfully reinforce the effect required, which is here of winter 'frosty yet kindly', viewed without, not felt within. If it had suited his purpose he could have selected details that would have chilled our hearts, as both Tennyson and Keats do in *St. Agnes' Eve*. *Brooding* is a fine example of the poet's power of selecting not only significant detail but the word that perfectly images it; broody hens puff themselves out to cover the nest more completely, and birds in snow do the same so as to enclose in their feathers a non-conducting layer of warm air. So the single epithet *staring*, by hitting the essential characteristic of the owl's appearance, has power to suggest all the other details.

To *keel* the pot is to cool it—by taking it off the fire.

28 *That time of year thou may'st in me behold*

THREE pictures expressed of desolation and decay, and three more suggested, of ruined churches, the shadow of Death, and a death-bed. In its marvellous selection of details that reinforce one another, and in its concentration of suggestive power, this is the most remarkable of the sonnets. 'This thou perceivest': a man so seeing himself does not ask for love; *leave* in the last couplet therefore is not, as has been suggested, a misprint for *lease*, lose. The meaning probably is 'Carpe diem: learn by me to make the most of the world you must soon leave'.

29 *When to the sessions of sweet silent thought*

BEN JONSON, who complained that Shakespeare 'wanted [i.e. lacked] art', would probably have

approved this most artificial of the sonnets. Though the soft sad music of the first line is beautifully appropriate, the alliteration throughout is too consciously sought. We feel that grief should not be so precious as this.

In *sessions* two images are involved: (a) of his sitting, brooding over his thoughts; (b) of memory summoned to give evidence, as a witness before a court.

30 *Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,*

THE slow, irresistible power and sweep of the open vowels in the first line and the hurry of the short ones in the second make this, to me, one of the most wonderful similes in Shakespeare. There is in it a sense of the contrast between the measureless rhythm of eternity and the swiftness of the passing moment.

Nativity . . . eclipses: though Shakespeare knew that 'it is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are underlings', like all the writers of his age he uses the language of astrology and refers to its beliefs. *Nativity* is fate read in the arrangement of the stars at the moment of birth. Here, however, it seems to mean the star that rises with us, our life's star, which moves, slowly brightening, up the sky, till having reached its highest and brightest it is eclipsed and darkened.

parallels: military trenches; Time digs himself in.

LINE 11. Physical beauty is a rare gift and the first to be preyed upon by Time.

31 *Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,*

THERE were two jargons with which in Shakespeare's age every one was as familiar as we are with those of spiritualism and sport, the terms of astro-

logy and law. Sacrilege had at once weakened religion and thrown great quantities of land into the market, and further, by encouraging prodigality, had helped in the breaking up of feudal estates. So, as in our own day, superstition was rife, and the newly rich were everywhere buying land; every one was acquainted with the legal terms used in its transfer and so able to appreciate the metaphors drawn from them, as in this sonnet which is full of metaphors drawn from the jargon of conveyancing. Charters, bonds, and patents are all legal agreements establishing rights of property. Granted under *misprision* (misapprehension) they are therefore void. To us all this sounds artificial. Yet the simple pathos of the concluding couplet almost persuades us of the sincerity of the whole.

The sustained use of feminine rhymes throughout, even to the closing couplet, is unusual and noteworthy. It differentiates the sonnet not only from those of the Italian form but also from the rest of Shakespeare's.

32 They that have power to hurt, and will do none,

PALGRAVE's note refers us to Hamlet's eulogy of Horatio (III. ii. 70-8), as 'one, in suffering [i.e. experiencing] all, that suffers nothing' [i.e. is not injured]; 'a man that is not passion's slave'. But the thought is probably that expressed with far greater power in Sonnet 129.

The notable thing here is the instructive contrast between Gray's shallow view of a flower (No. 147, l. 55) and Shakespeare's profounder insight. Shakespeare's imaginative insight showed him, what Gray was not great enough to understand, and what Tennyson had to learn from modern science, that life was not created 'to sub-

serve another's gain'; the flower's sweetness exists for its own sake and is not wasted because no human eye perceives it. So Wordsworth placed himself with Shakespeare above Gray when he affirmed his

faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

33 *And wilt thou leave me thus?*

So sincerity makes love—in monosyllables, and short phrases of broken rhythm, and with insistent repetition.

Pity. the two syllables must be given equal force.

34 *As it fell upon a day*

THE short couplet is not a fine musical instrument. Its most characteristic effect is heard in the tinkle tinkle of the opening lines; what can be done by a fine poet even with an instrument of such limited range may be heard in the last few couplets.

Barnfield followed the classical legends in calling the nightingale *she*, but he evidently knew from his own observation that the bird sings by day as well as by night, though not, in this country, in groves of myrtle.

37 *Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part,—*

THE weakness of the Elizabethan sonnet is the sudden change of tone caused by the transition after three quatrains to a couplet. In this example, however, the sudden contrast, accentuated as it is by a change to feminine rhyme, produces a very effective correspondence with the change of mood. The greatness of this sonnet makes instant impression; part of the secret lies in the remarkable corre-

spondence between the verse rhythm and the natural rhythm of its words. The phrases are not composed to fit the pattern: they are *selected* from the actual speech of men. 'Nay,' 'I have done,' 'You get no more of me,' for example, with all the curt decisiveness of natural speech, goes straight into the verse, where it takes on the beauty of ordered form with no loss of natural force through having to be humoured to fit the artificial pattern. 'The natural tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition,' of which Wordsworth speaks, has no effect here; art and stark reality, beauty and truth, are one. That is one of the secrets, as Dr. Johnson discovered (No. 177 note), by which Shakespeare worked his miracles. The eighteenth century lost it, and invented 'poetic diction', the language of verse-makers substituted for the speech of men; so it substituted Personifications with capital letters for the figures we see grouped round passionate love's bedside in lines 10-13.

LINE 9. The effort of breath required to voice this line clearly, particularly *last gasp*, is very suggestive of its content.

38 *My lute, be as thou wert when thou didst grow*

BEGINS in the Italian form, changes to the Elizabethan, reverts to the Italian, and ends in the Elizabethan couplet. The content similarly is a mixture of artifice and natural pathos.

42 *Blow, blow, thou winter wind,*

THE repetition of the strong vowel in the opening words of the first stanza, and of the explosive *f* in

those of the second, strikes a passionate note at the outset and emphasizes the leading idea in each stanza.

Unkind has lost force since Shakespeare's time; it meant as here, unnatural, because against kindred. *Warp* is to change the shape.

43 *My thoughts hold mortal strife*

'HATING life I call for Death. But he, having just seized the fairest of creatures, scorns a wretch like me.'

Beauty's rose is perhaps the poet's lady, cf. No. 38; possibly Prince Henry, elder son of James I, whose untimely death happened about the time the poem was written.

45 *Fear no more the heat o' the sun*

THE weight of thought here makes this less suitable for music than most of Shakespeare's songs. But by the time he wrote *Cymbeline* he had ceased to be careful of such details. Mr. Masfield calls this lyric 'the loveliest thing in the play'.

Golden in line 5 is a fine example of Shakespeare's concentration of thought—beauty of form, radiance of spirit, soundness of nature are all implied.

chimney-sweepers come to dust: a grim jest.

the sceptre: kings: a good example of metonymy.

consign to thee: seal the same bond, i.e. with Death.

46 *Full fathom five thy father lies:*

THE pregnant word is *sea-change*. The song should be compared with Mr. Masfield's 'Posted as Missing', which is intended to be spoken as this to be sung.

Are (line 2): a pedant's grammar would make the line sound both ugly and incorrect.

47 *Call for the robin-redbreast and the wren,*

SUBTLE alliteration largely accounts for the sweetness of the music. The hidden pattern of *r*, *v*, *f*, and *m*, is well worth studying.

Them in the last line refers to the hillocks.

49 *No longer mourn for me when I am dead*

THE slow movement is exquisitely appropriate. The effective placing of the long vowels is largely responsible. In *surly sullen bell* the sound of a tolling bell is unmistakably suggested.

The attitude towards death is characteristic of the pagan renaissance.

53 *Calm was the day, and through the trembling air*

WRITTEN to celebrate the double wedding of the Earl of Worcester's two daughters. The name *Prothalamion*, 'a song written before a marriage', was coined for the occasion.

The form of the stanza is worth careful study: the rhymes are arranged with consummate skill to gratify the natural appetite of the ear for repetition while never (as sometimes in the *Faerie Queen*) cloying it with monotony. So, while the sustained music of the long line of five stresses is most appropriate to the mood, variety is given by the introduction at intervals of short lines, at first singly and then, by a further refinement, in pairs. The occasional introduction of feminine rhymes also lends variety. The art in the refrain should not be overlooked: to bear repetition words must charm by their imagery or their music. These are skilfully chosen to give us the double delight.

The music of this stanza can hardly be matched by Swinburne or Mr. Bridges, the only English

poets that can compare with Spenser in their mastery of the technique of stanza-form. In this poem he might have successfully invoked the river of which he is writing,

Oh, could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
My great example, as it is my theme.
Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

One or two allusions call for some elucidation. *An house of ancient fame* (line 131): Spenser, though he came of a Lancashire family, claimed kinship, on evidence unknown to us, with the newly enriched Spencers of Althorp, who in turn, on no evidence at all, claimed descent from the Norman family of Despenser.

Bricky towers (line 132): of the Temple; the site was occupied by the Knights Templars from 1185 till their suppression in 1308, and since as the headquarters of the lawyers' trade union.

A stately place (line 137): Essex House, from the 'noble peer' of line 145; as Leicester House it had been occupied by the 'great lord' of that name whom the poet mourns as his patron.

noble peer (line 145): Essex, who had in that year, 1596, led a successful attack upon Cadiz. Line 153 is a bad pun on his family name De Vereux, who should be *heureux*.

The two bridegrooms (line 173), Henry Guilford and William Petre, are compared to the twin stars Castor and Pollux shining in the belt of the Zodiac.

57 *The World's a bubble, and the Life of Man*

IN America they have so much respect for a lord and for Shakespeare that they imagine that only the one could have written the other. This poem of 'Lord' Bacon's, however, contains no trace of the consciousness never long absent from Shakespeare

that 'there is some soul of goodness in things evil' and that 'the web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together'. We have his opinion of this railing in Gratiano's rebuke to Antonio:

You have too much respect upon the world:
They lose it, who do buy it with much care.

60 *Tired with all these, for restful death I cry—*

THIS perhaps represents Shakespeare in the radical stage of his political development.

62 *This is the month, and this the happy morn*

THE poem, written when Milton was twenty-one, though splendid in itself, is even more noteworthy for its promise and suggestion of what was to come. The learning of the scholar accounts for too much of the matter; but original poetic power is seen in the music of the opening lines, in the imagery of stanzas 4, 5, and 19, and most characteristically in the musical use of proper names, 'almost singing themselves they run'.

The obvious regard paid to the architecture of his stanzas may be due to the influence of Spenser, but it also suggests that the young Milton realized the disciplinary value of self-imposed limitations and of their stimulus and challenge to expressive power. When he had learned to do without their aid he could belittle the harmonies of rhyme as a jingling of like endings; but these stanzas, with their richly varied chimes, emphasizing the variety of line-lengths and the elaborate artistry of the pattern, will always provide an unanswerable objection to his theory. On the other hand, his theory that poetry should be 'simple, sensuous, and passionate' is well illustrated here, and amply justified. In the fine fourth stanza, for example, the general

statement in the first sentence is translated into 'sensuous', i.e. concrete images, in the remaining lines. It will be noted that the epithets are as concrete as the things: *hooked* makes us see the scythes upon the chariot wheels, and *idle* brings home its fact as no other word could do.

63 *From Harmony, from heavenly Harmony*

POPE'S critical axiom that

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense

is strikingly illustrated in this poem. Thus, at the end of the first strophe in the line referring to the diapason, i.e. culminating chord, the open vowels give dignity of sound appropriate to the grandeur of the theme and to the culminating position of the line. So in the middle strophes the characteristic music of each of the instruments referred to is suggested in the sound and movement of the verse. This is achieved, for example, by the repetition of *r* in the trumpet lines, by the heavy *d*'s of the big drum, and the rattle of the lighter *t*'s of the kettle-drums in *'tis too late to retreat*, by the soft *s*'s and liquid *l*'s of the flute stanza, by the skilful variation and runs of vowels, suggesting the range of the violin, and by the attempt to make the organ stanza the most melodious of all.

The epithets used of the flute and violin give unmistakably the musical quality of the two instruments.

64 *Avenge, O Lord! Thy slaughter'd Saints, whose bones*

WRITTEN in 1655 when the Duke of Savoy massacred for their nonconformity the Vaudois, inhabitants of some remote Alpine valleys who had till

then preserved at once their independence of the Pope and, as Milton supposed, the 'pure faith' of early Christianity uncorrupted by ritualism and image worship.

Palgrave refers to this sonnet as 'a collect in verse', 'the most mighty sonnet in any language known to him'. It is the first in his collection 'constructed on the original Italian or Provençal model—unquestionably far superior to the imperfect form employed by Shakespeare and Drummond'. It is not, however, a technically perfect example; for the pause in the sweep of its thought, the point at which the wave as it were breaks and returns upon itself, is not clearly marked in the structure of the form. It is reached at *heaven* in the middle of the ninth line and not, as always in the perfect form, at the end of the eighth.

The monitory effect gained by the repeated employment of *o* as the vowel of the words emphasized by rhyme is most striking. But again the persistence of a single vowel-sound obscures still further the twofold structure of sonnet form.

The triple tyrant is the Pope, who wore a triple crown emblematic of his rule in earth, heaven, and purgatory.

Babylonian woe: the Puritans applied to the un-reformed church the language used of Babylon in Rev. xvii, xviii.

65 *The forward youth that would appear,*

THE ode is called Horatian as being written like many of Horace's in lines grouped in fours, but it is much more Horatian in its closely-packed thought.

The monotony incidental to the repetition of couplets is here skilfully avoided by the device of pairing couplets of unequal length.

Concentration of meaning and some historical

allusions now obscure make advisable some elucidatory notes.

LINE 1. The youth ambitious to bring himself into notice; *appear*, now used in this sense of actors only, once applied to the wider stage of the world.

5. Fame is now to be won by men of action like Cromwell rather than by literature. The use of concrete images to suggest this should be compared with Milton's in No. 62, lines 55-8.

9. *cease*: in its obsolete sense of rest.

12. *star*: of destiny, cf. No. 30, line 5 note; but Cromwell was strong enough to master fate.

15. *thorough his own side*: through the ranks of his own party he forced his way to its leadership,

17-20. To an ambitious man a rival and an enemy are the same, and restraints upon his power are more intolerable than opposition to it.

21. *burning*: the image of Cromwell's fiery star is maintained.

23. *Caesar's*: the head of Charles I, which on his coinage was crowned with laurel.

42. Two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

46-52. A suggestion that the King's flight from Hampton Court in Nov. 1647 was artfully designed by Cromwell to discredit him.

53-64. A justly famous picture of one of the most famous scenes in history.

63-4. The grave dignity of the rhythm here and the image in the simile are equally admirable.

65-6. The King's death assured Cromwell of the power he had gained by force.

67-72. The reference is to the legend that a head was found in digging the foundations of Rome, which was taken as a sign that the city would become head of the world.

104. *climacteric*: fateful (see Dict.). Marvell is

speculating whether Cromwell, as the Man of Destiny, may not, like Caesar, invade France, which was supporting Charles II, or, like Hannibal, invade Italy, which was opposing the Reformation.

105. *The Pict*: the Scots, whom Cromwell was preparing to attack.

106. *parti-colour'd*: gaudy, in antithesis with *sad*, sober-coloured, to set into sharp contrast Celtic duplicity and Saxon determination. The epithets may have been suggested by the thought of the variegated plaid in contrast with Cromwell's plain buff coat.

109. *tufted brake*: bushy thicket in which the Scots must hide like hunted deer, trusting that the pursuers may 'mistake' them for their surroundings.

117-20: A warning that successful usurpation must overawe secret conspiracy by showing itself as competent to maintain its power as to gain it.

Marvell's history is here as good as his poetry.

66 *Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more*

PATTISON observed of Milton's Latin poems that they were as such 'inaccessible to uneducated readers, and therefore to such readers necessarily an ungrateful topic'. If the word 'unlearned' is substituted for 'uneducated' his premise is to a large extent true of all Milton's poetry, but his conclusion by no means follows. It is true that what we get from any poet depends very much upon what we bring to him; and in Milton classical scholarship is so 'amalgamated and consubstantiated' with poetry that only he who already possesses the one can fully possess himself of the other. Yet, as the Poet Laureate has lately reminded us, Pattison's conclusion 'rests on the two shallow delusions: first that beauty must needs be fully apprehended before it can be felt or admired:

secondly that the young are unimaginative'; and he goes on to quote his great contemporary, Anatole France, 'who has brushed all this fallacy aside' in recording for us an experience of his own youth when he came upon a poem in which 'there were many words and phrases that were new to me and which I could not understand; but the general effect of them seemed to me so sad and beautiful that I was thrilled by a feeling that I had never known before—the charm of melancholy was revealed to me by a score of verses the literal meaning of which I could not have explained'. Mr. Bridges might have quoted with almost equal effect the greatest name of the last century, Sir Walter Scott: 'I rather suspect that children derive impulses of a powerful and important kind in hearing things which they cannot entirely comprehend'.

Of the truth of this, Milton's *Lycidas* is the best illustration in English poetry. It is a mosaic of ancient jewels of which every stone has shone in some earlier setting and had associations with departed greatness, so that its full significance is indeed inaccessible except as 'the last reward of consummated scholarship'; and yet it has an original beauty and charm for those who know nothing of its classical inspiration, as a child may delight in the sweetness of a flower without realizing that he has found it on the grave of a poet.

But notes, however elaborate, can never equip the unlearned reader with the understanding of the scholar. He will see for himself that the Mincius is a river; to tell him that Milton apostrophizes it because it flows by Virgil's birthplace will not make it mean (as it does to the scholar) more to him than the visionary river he has already conjured up for himself. But to point out the musical appropriateness of Milton's epithet 'smooth-sliding' is to set him at once on an equal footing with the scholar,

on ground above the reach of mere antiquarian criticism; for it is to give him an insight into that mastery of the technique of his art which, far more than his learning, made Milton the most consummate craftsman in the history of English letters, and to appreciate which is the essential purpose of poetic study.

These notes, then, do not essay the impossible aim of exhaustive explanation. They are intended to ensure that the pictures in the mosaic are clear to the reader, but not to indicate which diamond shone in the crown of Theocritus and which in the sword hilt of Homer.

For of *Lycidas*, perhaps more than of any other poem, Shelley's words are true. 'Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight.'

LINE 1. He will make a wreath of evergreens to crown the dead poet. Evergreens are also the symbol of immortality; and Milton knew that his poetry would be immortal.

3. *harsh and crude*. he fears that his genius is not yet 'mellowed' by sufficient study.

15. *Sisters of the sacred well*: the Muses who haunted the fountain Helicon on Mount Olympus and inspired poets to write.

23-36. Milton and his friend King had been scholars at Cambridge, and as shepherds tend their flocks from dawn till night, lightening their labour with rustic songs, so they studied and made verses

together. Milton said that poetry should be sensuous: here he illustrates in practice by making the passing of time appeal to our senses. We see the coming of dawn, hear the drowsy hum that tells of noontide heat, and watch the stars rise and swing westward across the heavens.

34. *Satyrs, Fauns*: imaginary creatures corresponding to our elves and fairies.

36. *Damoetas*: their Cambridge tutor, whose real name is unknown; it was perhaps William Chappel, afterwards bishop of Cork.

37, 38. Note the change of tone and movement in the sound of these lines caused by the predominance of long vowels, and the mournful effect of the repetition.

48. All the sweets of spring are suggested in the line.

50. *Nymphs*: 'guardian spirits'.

52. *on the steep*: the mountains of North Wales, overlooking the Irish Sea, in which King was drowned.

54. *Mona*: Anglesea, then 'shaggy' with woods.

55. *Deva*: the Dee, once supposed to have magical powers.

56. Milton probably means, 'I imagine that if you had been there you would have interfered—but what would have been the use?' but he may mean, 'It is idle to ask where you were, for you could have done nothing'.

61. The rolling *r*'s and the aspirate give an appropriate force to the sound of the line.

65, 66. What profit is there in devoting oneself to literature? Cf. lines 23–36 note.

69. *with*: Mr. R. W. Chapman reminds us that 'withe' was then so spelt.

74. *burst out into sudden blaze*: there is an explosive force in the sound. Cf. the spondee in l. 119.

75. *blind Fury*: Atropos, really one of the three

fates, but here denounced by Milton as acting like a fury.

77. *trembling ears*: he probably means that his ears were tingling because he had realized that he himself shared the 'infirmity of noble mind' of which he has been speaking.

79. We must perhaps supply 'is' after *nor*; cf. No. 348, stanzas 23-5.

88. *my oat*: oaten flute of line 33, i.e. 'I go on with my song'. As the subject of the next sentence *my oat* also stands for 'my muse'.

94. *beaked*: the metaphor is packed with suggestions of form, colour, and texture.

103. *Camus*: the river-god of the Cam.

105. As the sedge-blades wither in autumn they show markings like hieroglyphics.

106. *that sanguine flower*: the purple hyacinth, whose petals curl at their tips to form the Greek letters *ααα*, Alas!

108. The line, being slowed by groups of consonants between the long vowels, moves like a slow, firm tread.

109. *The pilot*: St. Peter; see Matthew xvi.

113. King was to have been ordained to the service of St. Peter's Master.

119. *Blind mouths*: a striking metaphor reminding us that the office of a bishop (vide Dict.) is to see that his clergy *feed* their sheep; so that blindness and greed are peculiarly inexcusable in the clergy. Cf. Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*. The objection that Milton is here mingling mythical and metaphorical shepherds has been conclusively answered by Hazlitt: 'the fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials'—even, as here, and perhaps here only, politics and poetry. Note the impressiveness of the spondee.

122. *They are sped*: have gained their ends.

123. *lean and flashy songs*: thin and watery doctrine.

124. The sound is as unattractive as the doctrine it speaks of; for *gr*, *scr*, *rtch*, and *str* are unmusical combinations of letters.

126. *wind* is Pharisaic, and *rank mist* false, doctrine.

128. *the grim wolf*: the Romish church and especially the Jesuits.

130. *that two-handed engine*: no one knows what is meant by this, but it has been supposed that Milton foresaw the execution of Archbishop Laud by the headsman's axe, though this did not happen until eight years later. But whatever the engine may be, its grim menace is powerfully suggested.

132. *Return*: the spirit of poetry has been frightened away by the stern voice of St. Peter.

136. *use*: dwell, abide. 'Low valleys where the soft whispers of shady trees and playful winds and swift streamlets make their haunt.'

142. *rathe*: early, *forsaken*: secluded from the sun.

144. *freak'd*: curiously marked.

151. *hearse*: a frame placed over a coffin, here supposed to be covered with laurel and flowers.

153. i.e., let us play with the thought that his body is here.

154. *shores and sounding seas*: the force of the sea and surf is in the sound of the words, as the roll of the waves is recalled in the movement of the succeeding line. It is such lines as these that made Tennyson speak of Milton's 'God-gifted organ voice'.

158. *monstrous*: a transferred epithet, 'world of monstrous creatures'; cf. No. 114, lines 9, 10.

159. *moist vows*: tearful prayers.

160. *Bellerus*: As Land's End was called *Belerium* Milton supposes there was a person of this name.

161. *Vision*: of the Archangel Michael, who,

having been seen on the Mount named after him on the Cornish coast, is imagined by Milton to be keeping eternal watch there.

162. *Namancos and Bayona*: places marked on old maps of Spain, opposite Cornwall. Milton was attracted by the sonority of the names.

164. *dolphins*: who were fabled to have borne Arion the musician safely to shore.

168. *day-star*: the sun.

169. *repairs*: the root-meaning includes the idea of raising again.

175. *oozy*: miry from the sea-floor.

176. *unexpressive nuptial song*: inexpressible sweetness of the music at the marriage feast. See Rev. xix. 9.

183. *Genius*: guardian spirit; cf. No. 62, line 186.

186. *uncouth swain*: untutored youth. Milton keeps up the fiction that he was a tiro at his art and a 'simple shepherd'. Now that his 'Doric lay' is ended he speaks with another voice. He marks the difference between his two roles by a sharp contrast of style: the 'pastoral' part of the poem is irregular in structure; the lines are of unequal lengths alternating on no fixed plan, the rhymes similarly are arranged on no definite pattern, and though there are divisions there are no stanzas. But now he abandons 'woodnotes wild' for the unmistakable voice of the trained singer; these last lines have the regular structure of a sonnet and their music has that calm, assured beauty which is the distinctive mark of what is called 'classic' craftsmanship. We see, and are meant to see, consummate mastery of technique; and we know that words would no more come to us and fall into their inevitable places at our bidding than stones would if we essayed to play upon Amphion's lyre. But the art which allows no artifice to be obvious in the pastoral part is no less inimitable and all-pervading;

the changes in line-length and the occasional blank line are there to ease not the poet but his readers, by giving them the delight of variety; and though the wealth of rhyme is not made obvious by a regular pattern, it will be found that the first section, for example, is even richer in rhymes than the last, though it seems to open like blank verse. They have not the looked-for delight of the stanza, but the charm of the uncertain return of the theme in a sonata. It is this supreme excellence of technique that justifies the claim of Milton's earliest editor: 'He that wishes to know whether he has a true taste for poetry or not, should consider whether he is highly delighted or not with the perusal of Milton's *Lycidas*'.

187. The beautiful personification here is a companion picture to Shakespeare's

The morn in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.
(*Hamlet*, I. i. 166.)

190. A lovely vision of the evening shadows.

192. *twitched*: the sharp sound corresponds admirably with the image.

67 *Mortality, behold and fear,*

68 *Victorious men of earth, no more*

69 *The glories of our blood and state.*

THREE most moving admonitions of human mortality, though none of them is so impressive as Raleigh's noble invocation of Death, at the end of his *History of the World*, which perhaps inspired them all. The first comes nearest in its direct simplicity of phrase, and the second is but a preliminary study for the third, which far surpasses it in the nobility of its music and the force of its images. It should be noticed, as helping to account for the gravity and dignity of sound in Nos. 67 and

69, that most of the words on which the voice naturally dwells, e.g. the rhymes, have open vowels.

In No. 67 we have

Nature to advantage drest

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

The thoughts are common to every man; but only a poet could give them a form so impressive and memorable.

The form of the stanza in No. 68 is too elaborately artificial for its theme, 'for there is no work nor device in the grave'; it would suit better a love song of Herrick. The last couplet especially trips far too lightly under its burden.

In No. 69, by the figure called metonymy kings and princes are represented by their characteristic belongings as peasants (in line 8) by theirs.

Murmuring (line 15): implies both (a) faltering and (b) protesting.

Seldom has a moral conclusion so happily justified itself as in the final couplet. For the moral is usually a descent into prose, but this, with its lovely image of roses blooming on a grave, is poetry, and as such has a validity independent of its moral implications. Cf. No. 319, stanzas 18, 19, and No. 334, lines 71-4.

70 *Captain, or Colonel, or Knight in arms,*

71 *When I consider how my light is spent*

THE first sonnet suffers a little by its juxtaposition with the second. Milton himself is the subject of both; but by contrast with the noble resignation and patient humility of the one, the other, though only by contrast, sounds too self-assertive even for Milton, to those who love him this side idolatry. Nowhere else has his characteristic dignity come so near pomposity, for his egotism here fails to

justify itself by any characteristic manifestation of his supreme lordship over words. Indeed nothing in the sonnet becomes it like the beginning of it—its title is perhaps the finest phrase in Milton's prose, unless it be the sudden force and abruptness of *went to the ground*, on which *and the repeated air* follows like the rumbling that succeeds a crash of masonry. The regular pattern of the normal five-stressed line is here broken up like the shattered temples and towers. (Cf. No. 66, line 5.)

In the opening line the necessary five stresses are gained by using the seventeenth-century pronunciation of colonel, cor-o-nel. *These doors* were those of Milton's house in Aldersgate St. where he was living when the king marched on London after Edgehill, in Nov. 1642. The *great Emathian conqueror* was Alexander, who in his sack of Thebes spared the house and family of Pindar for the sake of his poetry. So Plutarch relates that when the Spartans having taken Athens were about to demolish it some one began to sing a chorus from the *Electra* of Euripides, by which the conquerors were so moved that they spared the city.

72 *How happy is he born or taught*

THE surest means of winning immortality is to surprise the secret of that mysterious quality in virtue of which a certain form of words makes instant impression and ever afterwards haunts the memory. Wolfe achieved it with a single poem, No. 218, and Wotton with only two, this and No. 84. For to Milton's three essentials of poetry, simplicity (i.e. directness), sensuousness, and passion, must be added 'memorableness', which is usually the effect of them but in this poem is achieved mainly by yet another quality not mentioned by Milton, concentration of meaning. Wisdom is here packed as

in a proverb; it is pregnancy not picturesqueness of phrase that holds us. But though poetry may on occasion dispense with images it cannot exist apart from music, and so these lines have the rich cadences of a great statesman's voice.

Armour (line 3) is almost the only figure, and that not a specially happy one, for armour is outside the man and thought within.

Lines 7, 8 must have inspired Mr. Kipling's

Talk with crowds, and keep your virtue,
And walk with kings, nor lose the common touch.

In lines 11, 12 Wotton may have had Essex in mind, whom Bacon courted and by whose ruin he was accused of gaining advancement.

The difficult fifteenth line may mean 'never learned how to employ flattery to ruin a victim', or, perhaps, 'never learned by experience that flattery corrupts both giver and receiver'. Dr. Johnson rightly says that the use of a figure is to set a thing in clearer view; this metaphor of *wounds* is again not very happy.

Line 16. Wotton, who had lived as an ambassador in Italy, must have spoken with those who had known Machiavelli, and, indeed, need not have gone so far to see his doctrine of 'expediency' in practice.

75 Happy those early days, when I

A REMARKABLE anticipation of Wordsworth's 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (No. 287), and containing at least two lines,

Felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness,

as memorable as any in that greatest poem of the greater master.

Of the doctrine here enshrined, that, 'I know I'm farther off from heav'n Than when I was a boy' (No. 224, line 31), it may be said, as Dr. Johnson remarked of ghosts, 'all argument is against it but all belief is for it'. Every adult remembers that, though he did not realize it at the time, and perhaps sees no sense of it in the behaviour of his own children, heaven did 'lie about him in infancy'; and in spite of the Prayer Book assertion that we are 'born in sin, the children of wrath', this intuitive longing to 'travel back' and become again as a little child is justified by Christ's own saying that 'of such is the Kingdom of Heaven'.

76 *Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son,*

77 *Cyrnack, whose grandsire, on the royal bench*

A PAIR of sonnets which serve to remind us that there were Puritans with tastes as cultivated and refined as the king's, who loved fine music, good talk, and sound wine, 'making them go together, as they've good right to do'.

The thoughts in both sonnets reflect Milton's familiarity with Horace.

79 *Whoe'er she be,*

THE form of the stanza, with its lines of gradually increasing length and its maintained rhyme, tends to hold the thought in suspense up to an impressive climax. In the best stanzas, e.g. the first, second, fourth, and eighteenth, the thought fits the mould and illustrates Spenser's saying that

Of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form and doth the body make.

Palgrave has omitted half the original stanzas and has changed the order of those he has printed.

His meeting with Crashaw in the shades must have been an embarrassing one.

Rampant, in line 21, is a striking epithet drawn from the image of a rearing animal.

80 *Over the mountains*

IN four stanzas he plays prettily with the thought of love, but in the last his theme suddenly masters him and inspires the three noble images of impossibility by means of which we get the measure of Love's power. The use of feminine alternating with male rhymes in a regular pattern is noteworthy at this date; they were often used irregularly and indiscriminately, but it was left for Swinburne to realize their full value as a musical element in stanza-building.

81 *Ah, Chloris! that I now could sit*

82 *Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,*

83 *Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind*

THREE examples of poems which, if sung, make good songs and, if read, good 'light verse'. The noble thought in Lovelace's last lines, however, lifts them out of that category, and, in spite of the rather ludicrous images of the second stanza, dignifies the whole poem.

84 *You meaner beauties of the night,*

A FINER compliment was never paid to a woman (unless it were Fuller's to her great namesake—'living the first maid on earth, and dead the second in heaven'). It is no part of poetical criticism to inquire into the justice of such awards.

That 'art is selection' is well seen here, where out

of innumerable illustrations of superiority in nature, three of the most striking examples of supreme excellence are drawn from earth, air, and sky, and from 'night, and the light, and the half-light'.

The concluding line is a notable consummation and an admirable instance at once of the illuminating power of paradox and of verbal economy. We see Elizabeth casting all other women into the shade, yet, as representative of them, ennobling the idea of womankind.

85 *Daughter to that good Earl, once President*

'MILTON never learned the art of doing little things with grace,' growled Johnson, 'he overlooked the milder excellence of suavity and softness; he was a Lion that had no skill in dandling the Kid.' Certainly this rather formal and elaborate compliment, which contains more of history than of the lady, shows little knowledge of average feminine taste, and does something to explain the bewilderment of poor Mary Powell after her hasty marriage to the poet. Yet cumbrous and obscure as it is, compared with Wotton's, it is really a nobler tribute because in its cold bareness and calm it is more obviously sincere.

That good Earl was the first Earl of Marlborough, who as Sir James Ley had succeeded Bacon as Speaker and had pronounced sentence upon him on the charge of being 'stained with gold'.

That Parliament was the one of 1628, dissolved after passing the Petition of Right. The Speaker died four days after the dissolution.

At Chaeronea, in 338 B.C., Alexander, having bribed some of her leaders, subjugated Greece; on hearing of which *that old man eloquent*, Isocrates the orator, killed himself, being then 98 years old.

86 *It is not beauty I demand,*

87 *He that loves a rosy cheek*

88 *Sweet, be not proud of those two eyes*

THE first of these is a nineteenth-century imitation of the Carolean manner.

The verses have wit, polish, and ease of manner; but the thought is conventional and the images, where not hackneyed, are forced, as in No. 86, lines 2, 3, 15; No. 87, lines 2 and 3; and No. 88, line 2. Of each writer, however, it may be said that nothing in his theme becomes him like the leaving of it; they all make a good, and one (No. 88) an edifying, end.

90 *Drink to me only with thine eyes,*

91 *There is a garden in her face*

THESE, with No. 95, illustrate very well the meaning of the word conceit in its application to Carolean verse, most of which startles us by the ingenuity of its images much more strongly than it convinces us of its sincerity of feeling; they represent 'a kind of art which only a true poet could redeem from artifice, and then only if the reader should connive'. Certainly it is difficult to 'connive' at the conceit in the last quatrain of No. 90, unless when the critical faculties are lulled asleep by the accompanying music.

flow: As this is not the kind of poetry which it is profanation to touch, 'glow' may be suggested as an emendation to *flow* in the fourth line of No. 91.

92 *A sweet disorder in the dress*

93 *Whenas in silks my Julia goes*

TYPICAL of Herrick, who looked more on the outward appearance than into the heart; he was quite

capable also of writing No. 94. His ready vocabulary and habitually felicitous selection from it is well illustrated here—in *erring lace* and *tempestuous petticoat*, for example, and in his happy coinage of *liquefaction* to call up an image of undulating silks. He must be a sour hypochondriac who is not won to sympathy by the naïve, almost breathless, delight in the last line of No. 93.

95 *That which her slender waist confined*

96 *Bid me to live, and I will live*

I HAVE coupled these because, though the second is an incomparably finer poem than the first, they both contain illustrations of the bewildering mixture of obvious artifice with simple sincerity which characterizes the best poetry of the age, as unredeemed artificiality distinguishes the mass. In the last stanza of Waller and (at least) the first and last of Herrick, deep feeling speaks simply and convincingly, as love in any age might wish it could express itself; yet other stanzas in the same poem, e.g. the fourth and fifth of Herrick, contain assertions that surely no woman in any age or at any age would believe.

The moving tenderness of the music in Herrick's best stanzas, as softly sweet as anything in this book, is explained, so far as magic is explicable, by the absence of hard and guttural letters and by the instinctive employment of *l*'s and *v*'s, the most musical, and *w*'s, *s*'s, and *th*'s, the softest, of consonantal sounds.

97 *Love not me for comely grace,*

COMPARE No. 312, for which these lines perhaps provided the suggestion. The contrast of form in the two poems wonderfully reflects their difference in mood.

99 *When Love with unconfined wings*

THE poem has been much praised, for its velocity is apt to sweep one away too swiftly for a close examination of its rapidly succeeding images. It is perhaps well that we should pass quickly the wantoning gods and the draughts, unallayed with Thames water, to get out of hearing of the over-shrill protestations, and reach the end where, at least, we may pause in admiration.

It is remarkable how decisively the spondee, with its two strong vowels, pulls us up at the entrance of the last stanza and prepares us for the change of mood and tone. The thought, though in itself impressive and even profound, gains greatly by contrast with the extravagances that precede it.

The eighteenth line is wonderfully effective in its suggestion of bird song—until it makes us laugh by the image it conjures up.

100 *If to be absent were to be*

101 *Why so pale and wan, fond lover?*

THESE two poems, by almost exact contemporaries, both Cavaliers, of similar rank and upbringing, illustrate the strange contrast between persiflage and high inspiration which is so often found in individual poems, and which indeed seems to be a distinguishing characteristic of the literature of any age unbalanced by the excitement of war.

102 *Awake, awake, my Lyre!*

103 *Shall I, wasting in despair,*

IT is amusing to observe the contrast between the attitudes of the two lovers reflected in the care bestowed on the form of their respective verses. Cowley selects an intricate and difficult stanza for

his propitiatory offering; while the forthright Wither is content to repeat the simple couplet, and even so is not always careful to see that it rhymes perfectly. Yet one suspects that his wit and audacity would be preferred to the rather spiritless appeal of Cowley (whose power is here not equal to the instrument he has chosen), and is not surprised to find in Johnson's *Life* that Cowley 'was in love but once, and then never had resolution to tell his passion'.

105 *Thy hue, dear pledge, is pure and bright*

THE verses found in Bothwell's pocket-book, *Old Mortality*, chap. xxiii Palgrave inserted them here as illustrating the character of a seventeenth-century soldier of fortune, but they have much more of some characters in the romances of Scott's contemporaries 'Monk' Lewis and Mrs. Radcliffe.

106 *O waly waly up the bank,*

'MOST musical, most melancholy.' Compressed, but with inevitable loss, into two stanzas by Goldsmith, No. 138. The theme is age-old; but not even Burns in No. 139, or Kingsley in No. 356, or Dobell in No. 378, has touched it with the moving pathos of this anonymous ballad-maker.

The detail throughout is selected with exquisite propriety; the metaphor of the oak in the first stanza, the simile of the dew in the second, the appeal to the wind in the third, the recollections of the fourth, and the naïve image in the last, are exactly such as would naturally occur to a simple country-bred girl. Wordsworth would have found no better example than this to illustrate his theory that true poetry results from 'fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of man in a state of vivid sensation'.

The *green* leaves of line 22 are meant to remind us that she was still young.

The antitheses in the fourth stanza, the first expressed and the second implied, are very moving in their simplicity and naturalness.

Palgrave, in the interests of Victorian morality, substituted for the last line one of his own invention:

And the green grass growing over me
and forged a marriage certificate in supplying a title.

107 *I wish I were where Helen lies;*

AN admirable illustration of the artistic value of repetition, the most elementary, but also the most fundamental, principle in art. As the poem has room but for the one thought so the stanza admits but a single rhyme, the persistence of which emphasizes an insistency so intense that in common prose it would be monomania, yet by virtue of its art-form becomes as movingly beautiful as David's lament for his son. So the insistent refrain forces upon us again and again the scene which is always before the eyes of the speaker. The repetition at the moment of crisis in the fourth stanza, like the Porter incident in *Macbeth*, holds up the action until suspense thrills our nerves to the highest pitch of expectation. And lastly we note the effect of the more obvious device of repetition of the dominant thought, 'I wish I were where Helen lies', with which we are plunged at once into the tragedy and which haunts our ears at the end, and after.

108 *As I was walking all alone*

It has been said that there are only seven themes upon which stories have been written; of ballad *motifs* there are fewer still, and they are almost exhausted by the three examples here included.

These examples well illustrate the essential characteristic of the ballad, which is a stark, primitive simplicity not only of form, diction, and theme, but of what is much more fundamental, outlook on life. The ballad maker shares with Mr. Hardy alone among the moderns the unwondering pagan acceptance, as of a matter of course, of 'the grimness of the human situation'. He understands Lear's passionate grief at the cruelty of life, but not his bewilderment that such things should be; and his only philosophy is that of Corin: he 'knows that the more one sickens the worse at ease he is and that the property of rain is to wet, and of fire to burn'. Nature, too, in the ballads is always primitive; we may hear of towns and villages, but what we see is always greenwood and river and sea, and never the results of the labour of men but only the scenes of their hunting and fighting and love-making.

There is a strange theory that because the ballads were originally sung in chorus they were composed by a chorus; which is like supposing that the General Confession of the Prayer Book represents the collected contributions of individual sinners. The persons who composed the ballads were obviously poets; but their names are no more remembered than are the names of those who in our popular proverbs concentrated 'the wisdom of many in the wit of one'.

109 *Fair pledges of a fruitful tree,*

110 *Fair Daffodils, we weep to see*

THE best-known of Herrick's poems, paired here by Palgrave, and probably in most memories associated together. Both reveal an unexpected depth of thought and pathos in 'an idle singer of an

empty day'; for the theme of both is the old, sad truth that 'man cometh up as a flower'. But beyond that they are no more a pair than the Hamlet of Saxo Grammaticus is fellow to the Hamlet of Shakespeare. One would leave Herrick cheek by jowl among the best of the Carolean poets; the other lifts him clean out of their company to set him for the moment beside Catullus.

The thought common to both poems is spoilt in the first line of *Blossoms* by the reminder in the word 'fruitful' that the blossom falls in order that fruit may follow; and so the questions and reflections in the remainder of the poem are answered and made idle before they are spoken. The form of the stanza, also, is not happily chosen; short couplets are not an instrument by which we can be made to hear the deep, sad music of humanity. The one admirable feature of the rhyme-plan is the unity obtained by the device of linking the first lines of each stanza.

But a detailed study of *Daffodils* reveals 'power each side, perfection every turn'. There is, first of all, and above all, the inspired consciousness, the conception so rare before Wordsworth, that while we share the untimely end of the flowers we share also a common life with them as the children of one Father, and so, in a higher sense of the word, a common end with them—'to slake Thy thirst', which is the true answer to the shallower-thinking Herrick of *Blossoms* and his echo, Waller, in No. 89.

Here Herrick is with Wordsworth (No. 254) and Browning (No. 348, line 187); it is in his perfect marriage of form and subject that he is with Catullus. His words have to express at once the slightness and fragility of flowers and the mystery of life and death. And the thing is done! His stanzas have even to the eye the lightness of flowers;

yet any one who reads them with due pauses on their numerous rhymes (which cannot be done until their intricate plan has been carefully considered) will hear in them a music 'of ample power to chasten and subdue'.

He who wishes to understand once and for all what 'form' means in poetry should write, and afterwards read aloud, two couplets, the first including the first four lines and the second the last six of one of these stanzas. He will then realize with Huxley that 'art and industry may get music of a sort out of a penny whistle; but when all is done it has no chance against an organ'.

Note in the last lines of *Daffodils* the lovely appropriateness of the similes to the subject of the poem.

111 *How vainly men themselves amaze*

OUR modern delight in the countryside as a source of interest and enjoyment began with the general laying out of gardens in the early seventeenth century; for though the monasteries and the greater houses had 'paradises' for exercise, life in the Middle Ages was so much an affair of tillage and the open air that 'the country' was no more enjoyed than it is by the average rustic of to-day. Marvell's lines for the most part, like Bacon's famous essay, happily express the kind of enjoyment which the average educated man, then, as now, would find in the possession of a garden, but in lines 43-56 he suddenly rises into the plane of 'the Being that is in the clouds and air, That is in the green leaves among the groves'; where, like his own bird, he sits and sings, of things not always intelligible—for who can explain precisely what is meant by

Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade?

Then, as suddenly, in the seventeenth-century manner, he is down to earth again, mocking because

All women born are so perverse . . .
From Adam's wife, who proved a curse
Though God had meant her for a blessing.

The reference in the last stanza is to a floral dial. As different flowers open and close at different hours it is possible to group them so as to tell the time by them; the goatsbeard, for example, closes at noon.

112 *Hence, loathéd Melancholy,*

113 *Hence, vain deluding Joys,*

WHEN Mr. Masfield said that 'the lyric at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* (No. 27) is the loveliest thing ever said about England' he was forgetting, among others, these two poems; which is the more strange because, of all the poetry in the language, they include the passages most likely to suggest themselves to any lover of the English countryside as he takes his walks abroad. For here, exquisitely epitomized, are all the pleasures that

Hills and valleys, dale and field
And all the craggy mountains yield,

at any hour of the day, from the dappled dawn to the goblin-haunted night, in moods gay or grave, in pensive solitude, or in jovial company.

But it is not only their catholicity which justifies Johnson's saying that 'every man that reads them reads them with pleasure'; the things that Milton notes are the things that most men would observe. There is nothing recondite in his details. A modern poet would notice that 'the leaf buds on the vine are woolly' or speak of 'the blue-necked wheat'; but such close observation is as foreign to Milton as to the average walker. He lived, for the most part,

like Matthew Arnold 'amid the great town's harsh, heart-wearying roar', and though he perhaps loved the country the more on that account yet he knew it the less intimately; and as Matthew Arnold calls his famous 'signal tree' an elm, which is really an oak, so Milton makes the skylark perch like a sparrow on a window-sill and sing at open, jasmine-muffled lattices. It would, however, be an exaggeration to say with Dryden that he 'saw nature through the spectacles of books', for these poems bear clear testimony to his direct observation of homely incidents that must have become familiar to him in his walks at Horton where they were written.

Dr. Johnson acutely observes that though 'the images are properly selected and nicely distinguished, the colours of the diction seem not sufficiently discriminated'. He means that though the cheerful man of *L'Allegro* and the melancholy one of *Il Penseroso* each selects for notice the details that naturally appeal to him, one the lark and the cheerful horn, for instance, the other the nightingale and the tolling bell, yet the prevailing tone in both poems is not greatly different, so that many passages of one poem might be transferred to the other without attracting notice by their incongruity.

The reason is to be found in the employment of the four-stressed, coupled lines for both poems, though its characteristic musical effect, of lightness and ease of movement, is appropriate only to the first. Not even Milton, supreme master of the varied line, could in the same medium produce an entirely dissimilar music throughout the whole length of two long poems. Single lines, as will be noted, he does frequently transpose into a new key by rearranging their stresses; but to do so with all would have been to change his whole medium. And that indeed, had he been in the thirties instead of the twenties, he would have done.

One thing, however, he could never at any age have done: he could never have charged a poem on England with the secret of that spell which invests the English earth with almost a sacramental power. A voice that could do so cried once, in the dying speech of Gaunt, and then was silent almost till our own day. These poems, lovely as they are, are after all, 'but a gallery of pictures'; neither they, nor any of Shakespeare's lyrics, are 'the loveliest things ever said about England', for they lack the mysterious power of a personal love passing the love of women which in some stanzas of Mr. Kipling and Mr. Belloc is felt to clutch at our hearts. That only comes to men who know more of the face of England, of her people and her past, than Milton, lover of England though he was, either knew or cared to know. The deprivation is the price he paid for an alien culture.

L'Allegro: the cheerful man; who 'among the successive variety of appearances' selects those that harmonize with and enhance his temperamental lightness of heart.

LINES 1-10. The unequal lines of this opening apostrophe enable Milton to employ the 'full resounding line' and the emphatic short one appropriate to his denunciation of Melancholy, in happy contrast with the gay tone of the invocation to Mirth that follows it. Which makes it the more strange that he did not appreciate the expediency of making a similar contrast in the form of *Il Penseroso*. Images of horror were surely never so closely packed as in these lines.

1-3. Melancholy, not personified in ancient poetry, is here made the hell-born child of Midnight, wife to Erebus, by the monster Cerberus.

6. *jealous*: emulous to spread widely, as a brooding fowl to enlarge her surface.

17. *some sager*: Milton himself, inventing mythology; he thinks the open air and the dawn likelier begetters of Mirth than Venus and Bacchus.

32. A justly famous example of vivid personification.

36. Mountains are open and free and have commonly been the home of untamed races.

42. The pattern of the line is suddenly broken to agree both with *startle* and with the sudden burst of the lark's song.

45. *then*: i.e. after calling up the day; the lark then salutes the observer at his window.

50. Darkness, personified as a fiend in line 6, is here with equally imaginative art pictured as a retreating host of shadows. The opening dactyl suggests a sudden rush.

52. Once again the sound helps the image by its appeal to the ear as well as the eye.

57. *not unseen*: because the self-satisfied man courts observation; cf. 113, line 65.

60. *state*: the image is of a state procession. The stresses are rearranged to give the line a special and becoming grandeur of sound.

67. Like the other labourers the shepherd is at work, and his first job is to count the sheep to see that none have strayed in the night.

74. *labouring*: teeming, heavy with rain.

78. *bosomed*. embosomed. A lovely picture of church and manor house rising above the trees on a hill.

79. The touch gives a human interest to the scene; cf. No. 160, stanza 1.

83-8. A scholar's names for country folk.

96. *chequered*: dappled with light and shadow.

102. *Faery Mab*: a fairy accustomed to steal cream from dairies in days before the blame was laid upon the cat.

103. *she*: the country wench telling the tale.

104. *he*: a rustic who tells how he was led astray by a will o' the wisp.

105. *goblin*: Robin Goodfellow, a brownie, who for a bowl of milk set ready for him overnight will come and labour for the household.

113. The words of the line are full of the energy it describes.

117. *then*: next, after these country joys.

120. *trumphs*: pageants.

132. If there is a comedy of Jonson's to be seen.

133-4. A well-known reference to Shakespeare's nature and poetry and to his independence of mere book-learning.

135-50. The best wine kept until last. Music in both poems is the supreme pleasure; and in both the most melodious lines are reserved for it.

LINES 11-30. He compares the personified melancholy (=literally 'black humour') to various mythological females who were black but comely.

43. The alliteration of the heavy *d* appropriately weights the line.

65. *walk unseen*: because the melancholy man shuns observation (cf. 112, line 57).

68. Note the picturesque force of the metaphors *riding* and *noon*.

76. A fine instance of suggestive music.

83. Night watchmen with bells walked the streets and called the hours. Bells, especially of churches, were believed to drive away evil spirits.

87. *outwatch the bear*: keep awake until the constellation so named had faded in the dawn.

88-96. Commune with the spirits of Greek philosophers to discover the secrets of spiritual existence.

97-102. The references are to Greek tragedy; Shakespeare's are ignored, unless Milton is thinking of them in lines 101, 102.

109. *him*: Chaucer, who left his 'Squire's Tale' unfinished.

120. The reference is to allegories like the *Faery Queen*.

121. In this longer line he seems to have slipped for a moment instinctively and inadvertently into another and a more appropriate key. The contrast in movement between this and the next line is greater than is needed to enforce the change from night to morning; for the morn here is 'civil-suited', i.e. dressed in dark clothes of dull clouds.

135. *monumental*: a noble epithet, finer because truer than Tennyson's 'immemorial elms' (for the elm is a comparatively short-lived tree), and more full of the suggestion of a visible witness to the reality of the past. It makes us see the oak not merely as a tree but as a pillar set up for a testimony to our fathers.

114 *Where the remote Bermudas ride*

THE lines have the effect of a magic-lantern in flashing their pictures successively before our eyes, but they have also a haunting melody as of a hymn meant not to be sung but recited, written on the text, 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof'. The opening line takes us at once into the world of romance.

The figures of speech are impressive and memorable. The sea monsters 'that lift the deep upon their backs' are a magnificent example of hyperbole, as are the apples of line 23 (unless pineapples are meant, of which a tree bears but one); the simile that describes the orange and the metaphor of the jewels in the pomegranate are magical in their suggestion of colour; and the personification of the sea is ineffective only because the music of the words is so suggestive of the sound of the breakers

that it calls up an image of an actual beach and not a personified sea.

The association of ideas in line 12 gives us a glimpse into the minds of seventeenth-century puritans.

115 *Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heaven's joy,*

IN these verses the 'God-gifted organ-voice' is heard for the first time in its full power and range. In them Milton made the discovery which made *Paradise Lost* possible, that he did not need the device of a formal stanza to help him mould his subject-matter into a form of beauty nor that of rhyme to regulate and lend variety to his music; for though he uses rhymes, he so varies the rhythm of his five-stressed lines that while every one of them suggests its type no two of them are alike, but move 'like ocean waves in eternal difference in eternal sameness'. In them, too, the theme of *Paradise Lost* is already suggested; and Milton has made God in his own image, a Being of power and light, aloof from men, sitting above the Cherubim amid eternal harmony. They are said to have been written within a year of the *Nativity Ode*. If so, that year, the twenty-second of his life, marks the most important stage in the development of Milton's genius.

116 *'Twas at the royal feast for Persia won*

ALEXANDER celebrates his victory over Persia by a feast at Persepolis. Seated among his nobles with his courtesan by his side he listens to his musician, whose music elates him by telling how Jupiter begot him in the form of a serpent, excites him by the praise of wine and war, moves him to pity the fate of his vanquished and murdered foe, and thence

to what Dryden calls 'love' for the woman at his side; at this point, however, it recalls him to the duty of avenging his dead soldiers and excites him to rush out and burn the city. 'What passion cannot music raise and quell?'

A work of art is not to be judged by its materials: whether or not we call them common or unclean depends absolutely on the artist's treatment of them. If he so uses them, as Shakespeare uses the basest of all trades, in *Pericles*, to give us some great and severe experience for the imagination, then it is not for us to complain of the taste of our medicine. But Dryden in this ode gives us merely the kind of imaginative experience which we can create for ourselves, out of our memories of Mafeking Night.

The ode was highly esteemed by the rhetoric-loving eighteenth century, but to us is more interesting as an historical document than as poetry. Its pictures are characteristic of an age in which art and morality were at their lowest; and its music is as meretricious as its theme. True, so great a man as Dryden could not write 140 lines without including some that are memorable. In

Now! give the oboes breath; he comes, he comes
as in

Rouse him like a rattling peal of thunder
we hear the Dryden of the earlier ode, able to fill a line with the very sound and spirit of the thing it represents. So at the seventieth line we hear him change the music by lengthening his line to suit the altered mood, hush it with murmuring *m*'s and whispering *s*'s in the next strophe, wake it into swift life again by the introduction of dactyls after the thunder of line 101, and then by the strong spondee of line 126 check the pace again to introduce the quiet epilogue.

But all this is obvious artifice; which is why the

eighteenth century delighted in it. It is, however, successful artifice; some tricks here are not, for example the frequent device of repetition fails throughout to enforce the idea, and the shortening of the line in

Assumes the God
Affects to nod

produces not emphasis but an almost comic effect.

117 *Now the golden Morn aloft*

PALGRAVE in his Preface makes the high claim for the arrangement he adopted that 'the development of the symphonies of Mozart and Beethoven has been thought of as a model'. Nothing in his arrangement, however, can be compared in its effectiveness with his choice of this ode to introduce the poetry of the eighteenth century. It was an age of great men and great achievements, in literature not least; but there was one thing that Englishmen in that age, and in that age only, were unable to do: it was to sing—for joy, for wonder, for sheer lightness of heart. For the only time in our literary history the true lyrical impulse failed us.

So instead of 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' Gray, as the representative of his age, gives us these manufactured substitutes, 'a vermeil cheek and whisper soft' for the bloom and the frank voice of innocence, painted lay-figures masquerading as Morn or Misery, and empty pulpit eloquence for the expression of a genuine emotion.

The artificial and unconvincing personification, of lines 25 and 26 particularly, was to end at last in such banality as 'Inoculation, Heavenly maid!'; and the unnatural inversion in the same stanza, where, after long search, *shades* is found to be the object of *gilds* and *Hope* its subject, is exquisitely in keeping with it.

Yet, even in the eighteenth century, 'the voice of Nature cries,' and Gray's last stanza might have been written by Wordsworth himself.

118 *Happy the man, whose wish and care*

POPE asserts that he wrote this at twelve years old. But he was always more solicitous for effect than for fact, and it is probable that he retouched it considerably before he published it in his twenty-first year. In any case it is admirably typical of Pope in its neatly-packed expression; no other Englishman could say so much in so little space, without using figurative speech. The inversions which help to produce this economy should, for their perfect lucidity, be compared with the examples in the fourth stanza of the previous poem and the fourth of the following one. Such epigrammatic terseness was of course always characteristic of Pope. But the geniality of tone and the quiet joy in life which here speaks so musically soon deserted him. Neither did he use again such a sweet instrument as this stanza, with its remarkable correspondence to the woodlark's song—three bursts of melody as it rises and hovers, and a shorter one closing abruptly as it drops and settles. He remained the precocious schoolboy, but he lost the charm of the child.

119 *O say what is this thing call'd Light,*

THE pathos felt here owes much more to the nature of the subject than to Cibber's treatment of it. He is assuming that blind people, like Gray's animals in No. 117, have no imagination to inform them of their deprivation. It is true that the blind are often cheerful; but it is probably not Cibber's philosophy that sustains them. The jog-trot of his verse is intolerable, and the lines are more effective when read as prose, as at a children's concert.

120 *'Twas on a lofty vase's side,*

A SUPREME example of occasional verse, polished until every line is transparent, every epithet a picture, and every rhythm a gentle flow, witty, urbane, of its kind perfect.

But no great English poet has ever worked in this kind.

In *purr'd applause* (line 12) the wit in the thought and the suggestive sound of the words found to express it are alike admirable.

Similarly in lines 29, 30, note the suggestive contrast between the smoothness of the one line and the falling rhythm of the next.

Note also the witty significance of *eight* in line 31: a cat has nine lives.

By a last refinement the poem ends consistently with the polished jewel of an epigram.

121 *Timely blossom, Infant fair,*

IT is remarkable that Palgrave, whose omission of Blake is even more astonishing than his inclusion of J. Collins and Carey, Mickle and Mackay, should have included this poem which Blake might have inspired.

Sollicitous delight (line 4) is a happy use at once of the device of the transferred epithet and of oxymoron—paradox in miniature; her parents find delight in their anxious care for her.

122 *When Britain first at Heaven's command*

A GOOD example of rhetoric, which may be defined as the result of an attempt to produce poetry under the stimulus of an artificial emotion. It speaks well for the taste of our people that only the first stanza has survived in the popular memory.

Rule is often perverted to 'rules', so that a mere aspiration becomes a braggart assertion.

will is also sometimes perverted to 'shall' with a similarly ill-mannered result.

123 '*Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!*

THE word ode, alike in Greek and in English, has a general and a specific application. In each it refers to a kind of poetry in which a grave and dignified subject is spoken of or, more often, directly addressed, in verse of stately movement and grandeur of tone. So Pope called a small poem an Ode to Solitude (No. 118), and Milton a long one an Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity (No. 62).

But in a stricter sense the ode is a poem which has not merely these attributes, but a highly elaborate metrical form expressly designed to achieve them in the fullest possible measure. Ben Jonson and Congreve were the only Englishmen before Gray who understood its principles and structure. Their odes are not represented here, and so it fortunately happens that the first example of this highly artificial form of verse should be a poem by a writer who was before all else a scholar and technician, one whose skill and knowledge were so consummate that he almost succeeded in making sheer craftsmanship supply the want of genius. The ode, as here represented, consists of three similar divisions each containing three subdivisions of which the third, the epode, is unlike the other two, the strophe and the antistrophe. Originally the ode was chanted by a chorus of singers; as they moved round the altar in one direction they sang the strophe, during the return movement the antistrophe, and then, standing, the epode. The whole movement was then repeated, usually twice, with new words each time.

This noble example of architecture in verse

admirably illustrates that basic principle of art, variety in unity, repetition with difference; the epode lends variety to the unit, the threefold change of rhyme, but not of rhyme arrangement, lends variety to the whole.

Gray's mastery of his instrument can only be appreciated by those who will take the trouble to examine both the rhyme plan and the line-lengths of his first strophe, note their exact correspondence in the first antistrophe, observe how this plan is repeated again and yet again in the second and third pairs, and, lastly, how the three epodes exactly correspond to one another, even in their mid-line rhymes, while being markedly different from the opening sections both in size and plan.

Alas! 'The lyfe so short, the craft so long to lerne!' Gray's artistry, like 'those gems of purest ray serene the dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear', is all unsuspected by the trippers on the ocean of poetry.

LINE 1. *King*: Edward I, who is here supposed to have massacred all the bards of Wales after his successful campaign of 1282. The single survivor is speaking; by this device we are excited to interest by being plunged at once into the action, for the narrative does not begin until line 9. The first word, moreover, strikes with impressive suddenness the keynote of the whole poem.

29. In this, the first, epode the bard bewails his dead companions.

49. With the second strophe he begins a series of pictures, prophetic of the doom of Edward's posterity, calling on the gods to weave his predictions into the web of their fate. The change of quotation marks shows that the spirits of the dead bards are acting on his suggestion in line 47 and are chanting with him.

51. *verge enough*: space for the prophetic pictures or inscriptions woven into the web of fate.

55. *roofs*: of Berkeley Castle, where Edward II was murdered at the instigation of his wife Isabella of France, the 'she-wolf'.

59. *thy country*: France, which her son Edward III was to 'scourge' and lay waste, and thereafter, as the next lines tell, to die dishonoured and alone.

67. *sable warrior*. the Black Prince (so called from his liveries), who died a year before his father.

69. *the swarm*: of courtiers and parasites who left the death-bed of the senile king to ingratiate themselves with his youthful grandson Richard II, whose life was like a voyage begun in fair weather and ending in wreck.

81-3. Richard is here supposed to be starved to death in prison.

84-6. The Wars of the Roses.

87. *Towers of Julius*: the Tower of London was formerly supposed to have been founded by Caesar; it is called 'London's shame' because of its bloody associations.

89. *his*. the 'meek usurper's', Henry VI, who was son of the victor of Agincourt, and whose consort Margaret's steadfastness supported his cause.

91-4. The white and red roses were united in the royal badge after the marriage of Henry VII to Elizabeth of York following his victory over Richard III, the Boar (so called from his badge), who had murdered his young nephews and was himself killed at Bosworth under the thorn bush in which his crown was found. But the gore he there wallowed in was his own. In line 92 a colon should follow *spread*.

99. *Half of thy heart*: Edward's wife Eleanor was to die in 1290.

101-2. He appeals to the spirits who, having finished their curse, as line 100 and its quotation marks show, are departing.

110. In the third antistrophe, which begins in the next line, the bard prophesies smooth things of the new race of kings, the Tudors, who as Welshmen were 'genuine' Britons like Arthur.

115. *a form divine*: Elizabeth in the midst of her court. Note the importance of the comma in l. 113.

119. *strings symphonious*: the poetry and music which were to make the age glorious.

125. In the final epode the bard calls on Fierce War, &c., to adorn his verse while he foretells that of Shakespeare (lines 128-30), Milton (lines 131-2), and their successors in the more distant future (lines 133-4); and with a reminder to Edward that the war-cloud will vanish he makes an end of his prophesying and himself.

124 *How sleep the Brave who sink to rest*

'BUT the Lord was not in the thunder. And after the thunder a still, small voice.' From the last line of Gray's Ode to the first line of Collins we are passing from self-conscious artifice to unconscious art. It is like coming out of a picture-palace into a quiet churchyard or cathedral close. And if we knew no more of Collins than this we should read to the end without any disturbing consciousness of ingenious machinery producing and withdrawing lay figures on the stage. But if we are already familiar with *The Passions*, No. 141, we shall suspect sorrowfully that even here Collins is using the device of personification not because a poetic intuition made it inevitable but because the figure was a conventional trick of the age. Collins uses it until it becomes tedious, but Gray did most to stale it. In his hands the thing became a strumpet.

125 *The lovely lass o' Inverness,*

THE popularity of Burns's poetry owes almost as much to the accident of its date as to its own

merits; in contrast with the forced artificiality and remoteness from common interests with which the heirs of Gray and Pope had invested their legacy, the simple pathos and everyday humanity of Burns made instant appeal. A generation before Wordsworth, 'love had he found in huts where poor men lie'; and his discovery interested and excited a world which had almost forgotten the love songs of its forefathers and seemed to have lost the art, and even the desire, to write its own. It owes even more to the happy union of so much of it with traditional airs so native to Britain as to be, and not by North Britons only, 'felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;' it is significant that all but two of the poems here included were published as songs with a musical accompaniment, and that several, including this Lament, begin with a stanza of an old song which Burns deftly continues in the same metre. The cruel lord of line 13 is the Duke of Cumberland, who defeated the Young Pretender at Drumossie or Culloden Moor.

126 *I've heard them liltin' at the ewe-milking,*

LINE 1. *liltin'*: singing.

3. *ilka*: every. *loaning* milking place.

4. 'the young men of Ettrick Forest are weeded out.'

5. *bughts*: sheepfolds. *scorning*: jeering.

6. *dowae*: dull. *wae*: woeful.

7. *daffing*: playing the fool. *gabbing*: gibing.

8. *leglin*: pail.

9. *shearing*: reaping.

10. *bandsters*: 'the men who bind the sheaves'.
runkled: wrinkled. *lyart*: grizzled.

11. *fleeching*: wheedling.

14. *bogle*: boggy.

17. *dool*: grief.

22. *heartless*: down-hearted

129 *Toll for the Brave!*

By a happy chance this first of the poems by which Cowper is here represented illustrates admirably the notes of simplicity, sincerity, and familiarity which he helped to bring back into English poetry towards the end of the eighteenth century. Until that was done, until poetry was rescued from the minds of those who think and know, and brought back to move the hearts of those who only feel, it could not find its way again to its real home, which is that world of the spirit which we call the higher imagination. To quicken our intellectual life as Pope did by forcing us to appreciate and admire how efficiently language may be used to convey thought, and so to enlist our emotions on the side of clear thinking; to move our hearts to pity and so to enlarge and deepen our sympathy with other lives as Burns and Cowper did, these are high functions of poetry. But they are not the highest.

That supreme function is to make man conscious of the divine part of himself by trembling the veil which obscures from him the wonder of his being. When Pope quoted with schoolboy cleverness 'Know thyself' he was wiser than he knew; the 'proper study', i.e. the essential aspiration, of man is the becoming conscious of his higher self, Pope's ignorance of which is seen in his cheap antithesis between our knowledge of God and ourselves; for it is only through our own spiritual intuitions that we can know anything of God. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you: and the function of the highest poetry is to reveal it. Such poetry is the 'most pointed pleasure' which Stevenson prayed God to use to

Stab my spirit broad awake.

Of that, no poet between Milton and Wordsworth was capable. And so the eighteenth century believed

in minds but not in souls, in shades but not in spirits, in ceremonies but not in sacraments, in sentiments but not in passions, in fancy but not in imagination.

Wordsworth was born to redeem English poetry, body and soul; its body from artificial diction and outworn figures of speech; its soul from worldliness and commonplace sentiment. In both parts of the task he was anticipated by Cowper, but particularly in the revival of a simpler and more natural speech. *The Loss of the Royal George* might have been written by Wordsworth himself to illustrate his theory of poetic diction; indeed Cowper's own statement of his poetical aims reads like a paragraph from the *Preface* in which that theory is advanced: it is 'To make verse speak the language of prose without being prosaic, to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme.'

Never was aim more successfully achieved.

LINE 1. The pattern of the normal three-stressed line is modified so that the poem may open with a strong accent on the significant word *toll*, and that a pause may be substituted for a syllable after it, producing the rhythmical effect of a tolling bell. Cf. the opening bar of the 'Dead March' in *Saul*.

Note the predominance of open vowels in this stanza, with their effect on the movement and tone.

25. The change in the position of the accents, so that it begins and ends with a heavy stress, gives the sound a weight and an imperativeness very appropriate to the words.

31. *full charged*: the epithet applies with equal felicity to the line itself.

The memory of *The Royal George* and *The Revenge* will perish together—when English poetry itself is forgotten.

130 *All in the Downs the fleet was moor'd,*

BAGEHOT said of the poetry that Tennyson put into the mouth of Enoch Arden, 'so much has not often been made of the selling of fish'. Gay's scene is not set in fairyland or any imaginative realm, but in the real world of the British Navy and among those very real persons its sailors and their sweet-hearts. Yet they are made to speak and act in a manner impossible in the given conditions: they know nothing of naval discipline; and they do know the hyperbolical extravagance of language not of the average A.B. but of the more artificial eighteenth-century poets. Here neither is beauty truth nor is truth made beautiful.

Yet the simile in the third stanza is beautiful and appropriate; it at once conveys the image and ennobles it. And as it is spoken not by the sailor but by the poet there is no sense of incongruity.

In line 30 we have here an illiterate sailor speaking like the metaphysical Lovelace in No. 100.

With lines 41-2 cf. Dante, 'Love which moves the sun and the other stars', and thus realize the polar distance between the higher imagination, which is of Heaven, and fancy, its earthly counterpart.

131 *Of all the girls that are so smart*

132 *Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,*

133 *If doughty deeds my lady please*

A GROUP of songs, all of which to be fully enjoyed need the musical accompaniment for which they were written. In lines 6 and 11-13 of No. 132, however, the words have a suggestive music of their

own. The ideas here are almost all contained in the old song which Burns used as his raw material, but their exhilarating movement and energy of tone they take from the voice of Burns himself.

ride the ring refers to a military game in which a hanging ring was carried off on the point of a spear.

134 *Sweet stream, that winds through yonder glade,*

THE ideal picture in these quietly beautiful lines has the limitations of the eighteenth-century vision. The lady's name was Shuttleworth, but it might have been Amelia or Sophy Western or even Clarissa. Jane Austen remembered her under the name of Anne Elliot, and Dickens as Agnes Wicksteed. Shakespeare, too, knew and loved such a one and called her Cordelia, but it was not to her that he would have said 'Take all my loves, my Love'. She died soon after Queen Victoria, and was thus spared the unhappiness of misunderstanding her granddaughters.

135 *Sleep on, and dream of Heaven awhile —*

136 *For ever, Fortune, wilt thou prove*

137 *The merchant, to secure his treasure,*

Three examples of light verse which may be silver but are certainly not golden; for gold, even in the airiest filigree, has always a certain weight of substance.

138 *When lovely woman stoops to folly*

ONE of a small class of poems which show that poetry, like life, may be perfect in small measures. Cf No. 73, lines 9, 10, and Nos. 289, 290.

140 *Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake,*

Pindaric Ode: see note to No. 123. It will be observed that this ode, like *The Bard*, is of the

regular form in which the odes of Pindar were composed.

LINES 1-12. The opening strophe pictures Song as a river.

9. *reign*: realm; the corn-fields.

13-24. The antistrophe repeats Dryden's theme of the power of music over the passions. The *sovereign shell* is the lyre (cf. No. 63, l. 17).

21. *the feather'd king*: of birds, which perched on Jove's wrist like a falcon.

25-41. The epode tells how the dance was inspired by song; its lighter movement not only produces the necessary difference from the strophes but is appropriate to the subject.

35. *many-twinkling*: Johnson objected that 'we may say "many-spotted" but not "many-spotting"'. The final answer is that the word is instantly recognized as effective.

42-53. The second strophe asserts that poetry, 'the heavenly Muse', has the same power over human ills which the sun has over the night

54-65. The second antistrophe tells that poetry is common to men of every clime, from the sunless poles to the equator.

60. *repeat* tell of.

61. He breaks his metre to help his meaning.

66-82. The second epode shows how poetry passed from Greece to Italy and, on the decline of Rome, to Britain.

69-70. The slowly winding rhythm is not only suggestive of the river, but invites us to pause and contemplate both its own beauty and that of its image. *Amber* introduces a rare touch of colour.

72. *voice of anguish*: Greece suffered under foreign oppression for many centuries.

77. *the sad Nine*: the Muses. *Greece's evil hour* is an ill-sounding phrase. The history in the follow-

ing lines is very questionable; for the arts have always flourished under a despotic government, and never more than in Italy after the break-up of the Roman Empire.

83-94. The third strophe is devoted to Shakespeare as the greatest of Britain's poets, to whom Nature revealed all her secrets.

95-106. The third antistrophe refers to Milton and Dryden and to the *Paradise Lost* of the one and the poems (his greatest) written in heroic couplets, the pair of coursers, of the other.

101, 102. A rhetorical explanation of Milton's blindness.

106. Image and sound alike suggest the sweep of Dryden's lines in his best couplets

107-123. In the concluding epode Gray refers to himself as the successor of Dryden and foretells his own fame. He has made this doubly secure by the two most infallible means of gaining immortality. writing a single short poem of universal appeal, and a number of memorable phrases which are adopted into everyday speech or pass into the common stock from which every writer quotes.

115. *Theban eagle*: Pindar, on whose odes he models his own.

120. *unborrowed of the sun*: because they have a glory of their own.

141 *When Music, heavenly maid, was young,*

THE passions are shown as persons, each of appropriate mien and behaviour. They are listening to Music playing on her lyre, with her other instruments hanging on the myrtles near. Suddenly they are moved to seize each the instrument most suitable, and to express themselves through its music. It will be observed that the range of the lyre, like that of the modern violin, was great enough to

express passions so diverse as Fear, Despair, and Hope. The poem ends with an appeal to Music to assert her ancient power and stir the sluggish soul of eighteenth-century England.

LINE 16. As the passions are introduced, the form is modified.

30. At this point the music changes more decidedly, feminine rhymes and a longer, more melodious line being introduced; for Hope is a very different being from the three previous players. In lines 35 and 38, for example, there is an almost Spenserian sweetness.

41. Suitable sound-effects are obtained here and in line 43 by the alliteration of *r*, *d*, and *n*, two of which, it may be noted, are suggestive of the very word revenge.

47. *doubling*: echoing. Note the onomatopoeia.

61-8. The music here more than justifies the epithet 'mellow', even reminding us of Kubla Khan; but it is difficult to divine why Cheerfulness, who follows, should elect to play upon the same instrument as Melancholy.

69. The alteration, however, hardly affords a sufficiently marked contrast.

78, 79. Cf. Note to No. 124.

85. Collins has here, as in line 45, substituted assonance for rhyme. Note that Joy, like Revenge, plays on two instruments, and that each makes suitable choice.

108. Clio, the Muse of History.

114. The many-voiced organ, invented by St. Cecilia.

118. Prove to us that the Greek stories of the power of music were true, e.g. of Orpheus and Amphion.

142 *Lo! where the rosy-bosom'd Hours,*

JOHNSON has been charged with doing more injustice to Gray than even to Milton. His comment

on this Ode is typical: 'it has something poetical both in the language and the thought; but the language is too luxuriant and the thoughts have nothing new. The morality is natural, but too stale; the conclusion is pretty.' Criticism more acute and just was never written.

The joylessness which so strangely marks the eighteenth century, when all thinking Englishmen seemed to take their pleasures sadly, is well illustrated by the contrast between the spring rapture of Nash (No. 1), and Gray's melancholy brooding on the same theme.

Lines 5-7 illustrate the kind of language Johnson considered 'too luxuriant' and against which Wordsworth was to rise in protest. The bird intended is the nightingale.

The reflections in lines 16-20 and in the fourth stanza are prosy and commonplace; Burke has swept their verbiage away in the single phrase, 'What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue'.

143 *The poplars are fell'd ; farewell to the shade*

It is the glory of Cowper that he began the work which Wordsworth was to complete, of rescuing art from artifice and reasserting the forgotten truth that 'ars est celare artem'. But he often forgot that while art must conceal herself in an imitation of Nature she really creates what she seems to imitate.

His subject here is full of natural pathos, of the loss of old friends and the reflection that 'we ourselves must go'. But it was his business as an artist to have taken the facts as raw material and presented it in such a form that its natural pathos was heightened and made more moving than in any other form it could ever be. That form is the one which ensures that we shall receive the facts with

appropriate emotions. Now the poet's first means of inducing the appropriate mood is the music in which his subject is conveyed. It is thus before all things essential that the tone and movement of his music shall be suited to the nature of his matter. Yet here is Cowper talking of graves in rushing anapaests, the swiftly moving rhythm appropriate to the dash of Young Lochinvar.

With a turf on my breast and a stone at my head;
this is almost exactly identical with the rhythm of the line which describes the lively Lady of Banbury Cross,

With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes.

There are people who are content with the *Poplar Field* as it is, without regretting what it might have been. There are also people content with hearing Caruso on a gramophone.

Tennyson praised the 'exquisite flow and evenness' of these lines; the flow is unfortunately too obvious; but all anapaests have a 'bump-the-saddle' movement suggestive of anything but evenness.

The poplar makes eternal murmuring because its leaf-stalks, being flattened in the middle, twist at the slightest breath of air.

144 *Wee, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous beastie,*

SHAKESPEARE'S sympathetic insight into the feelings of the hunted hare in *Venus and Adonis* seems to us so natural that we do not appreciate it for what it really is, a remarkable instance of his universality of mind. For this conception, in which he anticipated Burns, that every living thing is man's 'poor earth-born companion an' fellow-mortal', was a very late growth in human consciousness; it had to wait for Wordsworth to carry

its truth alive into the heart by his impassioned declaration of the existence of a Being that 'Maintains a deep and reverential care For the unoffending creatures whom He loves', and of his 'faith that every flower Enjoys the air it breathes'. The realization of this by Burns is a no less remarkable instance of the power of his imaginative insight, for even to-day such a conception is utterly foreign to the thought of the class from which Burns sprang. It may be noted too that even Shakespeare's imagination did not in 1590 lead him, like Burns, to speak sympathetically *to* an animal and not merely *of* it.

LINE 4. *bickering brattle*: confused scamper.

6. *pattle*. English paddle, a small long-handled spade.

15. *daumen*: odd. *icher*: ear of corn. *thrive*: a stook.

17. *the lave*: the others that are left.

21. *to big*: to build.

22. *foggage*: coarse grass.

24. *snell*. biting.

34. *But* without. *hald*: place of safety.

35. *thole* endure.

36. *cranreuch*: hoar frost.

37. *no thy lane*: not alone.

40. *gang aft a-gley*: often go awry.

145 *Mine be a cot beside the hull*;

Cf. Notes to No. 164 and No. 413.

146 *If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song*

'STEALS slowly upon the senses like the deepening of twilight.' The earliest of attempts, since become common, but almost invariably futile, to write an unrhymed lyric in English. Blank verse may be musical, though only the greatest poets

can make it so except in rare snatches. But a lyric must have form and unity, a beginning, a middle, and an end; and this is even more difficult to achieve without the aid of the pattern afforded by rhyme. Collins achieves it in the readiest and safest way, by adopting a regular stanza-form as the unit with which to build his poem. His choice of stanza reveals the instinct of the fine artist: the two long lines strike an opening note of gravity and quiet (cf. l. 15-18), which is maintained and emphasized in the shorter ones, for these are really but the two halves of an alexandrine; printed thus, however, the stanza looks far more shapely and satisfying to the eye. The poem is indeed the quietest in tone of all in the English language, alike in music and colour. The tiny voice of the bat seems a shriek, and the beetle's hum to boom amid the stillness of the other lines. The clouds, even, round the setting sun, are colourless, the evening star is pale, Evening's car is shadowy and her veil dusky. Everything mentioned, the dew and the rain, and the twilight path, the pilgrim himself, the single human figure in the landscape, is grey. And we know that the one seeming exception, the brown of the hamlet, is really the colour of old thatch.

It is a pity that having dwelt so long with Evening and grown to know and love her we should be bewildered by four strange persons rushing in together at the last.

But for this we might have been left with the sense which haunts only the greatest poetry, that we have been on holy ground, and in the hidden but *felt* presence of something not of this world. Collins would then have accomplished what no other eighteenth-century poet even thought of attempting.

Sir Arthur Quiller Couch suggests that he *has* accomplished here what has never been done else-

where in English poetry—caught the secret of the Horatian ‘falling close’.

It will be noted, as helping to explain the quietness of tone in the music, that almost every line has its *S*, and almost every stanza its group of *m*’s, *l*’s, *v*’s, or *w*’s. Yet the ‘still, sad Music’ is modulated too, on occasion, to suit its content; in the tenth line, for example, the repetition of the high-pitched *shr* and *ɪ* is highly suggestive of reality in the image; in the last stanza particularly the sound-effects show great artistic skill, in the contrast between the soft *l*’s and *s*’s of the first line and the rolling *r*’s of the others.

Poetry can no more be read ‘at sight’ than music can be played: not until the fifteenth line, at *teach*, do we reach the principal verb, and therefore the full meaning, of the sentence that began in the opening line of the poem.

147 *The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,*

‘ABOUNDS with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo.’ And wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. For these reasons Gray’s *Elegy* competes with Longfellow’s *Village Blacksmith* for the distinction of being the best-known poem in the English language. Gray’s poem indeed is far greater than Longfellow’s; but it is so not because he was a greater poet but because he was a finer artist. The secret of the popularity of both is their mediocrity; but Gray’s is the very apotheosis of mediocrity. No such miracle before or since was ever achieved by ordinary human powers.

Johnson, one feels, would have liked to explain its popular appeal as Charles II did that of a certain preacher whom the town flocked to hear: ‘his

nonsense suits their nonsense'. But his innate aristocracy could not blind him to the truth that this explanation, so commonly valid, was impossible here; and so he wrote, instead, perhaps the wisest sentence of all his profound critical wisdom: 'by the common sense of readers, uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claims to poetical honours'. Milton thought otherwise. But by his cold aloofness from all but the 'fit though few' the greater poet lost the universal appeal which belongs only to those who, like Gray, are

Creatures not too bright and good
For human nature's daily food.

The stanza has the gravity of movement which in lines, as in men, goes only with a certain largeness, and which here is most appropriate to the solemn theme and reflective tone of the poem. The rhymes are alternate, and so avoid the snip-snap which only the greatest writers of couplets have escaped—which clashes with the gravity of so many of Shakespeare's sonnets, for example.

The first seven stanzas deserve, quite as much as Shakespeare's lyrics, the praise of being 'the loveliest thing ever said about England'. They are indeed, though the saying is a hard one, worth all the rest except the four beginning 'Yet e'en these bones . . .', which extorted from Johnson the just tribute 'Had Gray written often thus it had been vain to blame and useless to praise him'. For the reflections in the rest are, after all, but the everyday wisdom of a more figurative and mellifluous Polonius. The delight we feel in them is the delight of seeing our own opinions so exquisitely expressed. But suddenly we are in the presence of the true pathos and sublime. In the midst of the gentle

intellectual excitement of this delicious philosophizing, our easy impersonal theories on human life are dashed by the realization of a fact which has a particular and personal application, the grim fact of human death, of the inevitable hour when no philosophy or wisdom will serve, but only the instinct of our common humanity to crave and inspire sympathy. Polonius, for two stanzas, speaks with the voice of Hamlet. (Lines 85-92.)

We no longer say 'How well that expresses what I have always thought', but 'How that enables me to feel what I could always have felt'.

LINES 1-4 Gray, more than Milton, looked at life through the spectacles of books; his picture is probably a composite one, drawn from memory rather than direct observation. In late September, however, it might be possible to observe all his details simultaneously—the ploughman returning from the newly-reaped stubble, the cows, though somewhat late, from the milking shed to the pasture, and the cockchafer still oblivious of the coming frosts. The herd may, however, be the plough oxen returning with the ploughman after the day's work.

2. The drag, so noticeable and so felicitous, in this line is due to the groups of consonants between the vowels; the predominance of open vowels, here and throughout the poem, particularly in the rhymes, where they tell most, has a noteworthy effect upon the pace.

7. *droning*. A suggestive epithet.

8. Music as suggestive as sweet. Cf. No. 371, ll. 17, 18.

15. Cf. No. 371, ll. 137-40.

20. *no more*: never again, implying a custom; the *lowly bed* is therefore not the grave, though the double suggestion is inevitable.

26. The juxtaposition of the vowels in *row oft*

with the alliteration of *b* gives to the line an appropriate suggestion of effort.

33. *heraldry*: an ancient coat of arms was the distinction of a noble family.

35. *Awaits*. The subject is *hour*; the image of time lying in wait is much more impressive than that of the popular misreading which makes things wait for the hour.

39. *fretted vault*: a glance at the stone ceiling of a fine church tells more than any possible explanation.

41. *storied urn*: in the eighteenth century sepulchral monuments often took this form, and were inscribed with a history of the departed.

51. *rage*: passion, enthusiasm.

55-6. Cf. No. 32, lines 9, 10, and No. 272, lines 11, 12, 17-20. The intuition of the greater poets reproves the conventionality of the smaller. Milton too might have taught him that 'millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth' whose sense of beauty and the value of whose appreciation is more than human.

64. Foresee in the contented looks of their people the account which history would record of them and their statesmanship.

67. *forbad*: the objects of the verb are continued to the end of the following stanza.

69-70. 'prevented them from learning how to lie composedly.'

71. *heap*: at first sight the exquisite choice of diction seems for once at fault, for to pile in heaps what has no beauty except to the smell, and then only in minute quantities, is ridiculous. It is not, however, more preposterous than the fulsome and disgusting adulation heaped upon his patron by Dryden in the dedication of his *Essay on Satire*.

73. The line qualifies 'they' understood.

Madding: restless.

78. *still*: duplicate with 'yet', and really unnecessary even to the rhythm.

83-4. *text . . . that teach*: the lines have been so popular with the setters of examination papers that 'every schoolboy' can now 'correct the grammar of the following sentence and explain the error'.

rustic moralist: one who, like Mr. Weller, derives his philosophy from Martin Tupper rather than from Plato.

85. *For* carries on the sequence of thought; we need texts to teach us to die: for we naturally shrink from death.

prey is a suggestive and impressive metaphor.

dumb forgetfulness reminds us that our names must pass from the lips and minds of men.

87. One feels that this line must be somewhere in Shakespeare.

91-2. The pathetic appeal against inexorable oblivion; because 'there is no death save forgetfulness' and 'to live in hearts we leave behind is not to die'—the theme of *Thunder in the Air*.

93. *For thee*: as for thee; the poet is now speaking of himself.

95. *chance*: perchance.

97. *fantastic roots*: a touch of first-hand observation of Chiltern beeches.

107. Worthy to have inspired a line of La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

116. *Graved on the stone*: 'In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath.' Gray no longer allows simple truth to inspire his utmost skill, but manufactures banal personifications and artificial pathos. A tear was not his only possession; and if by it he means his poem (cf. *Lycidas*, l. 14), there is no apparent reason why he should have given it to Misery, who has plenty of them and would not consider a single one a 'large bounty'.

He who reaches 'the bosom of his Father and his

God' will do so with all frailties purged away, and will have nothing then to fear or hope. Where Milton failed it was impossible that Gray should succeed. But the false note of eighteenth-century sentiment is always at its worst in epitaphs, and Gray could not escape the infection.

149 *O saw ye bonnie Lesley*

150 *O my Luve's like a red, red rose*

'Look here, upon this picture, and on this.' In the *Leslie* stanzas we hear the rollicking riotous chorus of the victors of Dinas Vawr (No. 297), a little coarsened by the loss of some of its rhymes. It is as if one of them, like Alexander (No. 116, ll. 96, 97), was making love after the battle. But who, except those already prejudiced in the singer's favour, will believe sentiments so airily expressed? Who will not recoil from the flattery that brought misfortune on Herod? That is 'one way of love'.

'The other was a softer voice, As soft as honey-dew,' and the words spoken are the words of one who has said to himself,

My whole life long I learned to love,
This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion.

And cold reason can no more pry into the sincerity of that passion than a weak eye can face the sun; the hyperbole is as strong as in *Leslie*, but who for a moment thinks it exaggerated? But it is not, as with Lovelace (No. 99), mere velocity that sweeps us away, but power, the power of the wave, not the swiftness of the current. De Vere lamented (No. 41) that women preferred Pan to Phoebus, their taste is here put to the proof: do they, for example, prefer the conquests of Alexander, and the homage offered

to queens, to the loveliness concentrated in a June
rose and the melody that

Dissolves us into ecstasies
And brings all heaven before our eyes?

The version here printed of No. 150 gives the
first stanza an excited and exclamatory air which
makes it less impressive than the quiet certitude,
that needs no interjections, of

My love is like a red, red rose.

It should be observed how the two words made
conspicuous by rhyming at once epitomize the
suggestions of the stanza and suffuse it with their
lovely associations.

151 *Ye banks and braes and streams around*

LINES 5, 6. Personification here presents itself as
naturally and beautifully as Summer herself.

11. *fragrant shade*. Milton's second test for poetry,
that it must be 'sensuous', is well applied here. four
of the five senses are appealed to in two words.

25-32. It is the Burns of this stanza who has
taken the world by the heart. The very imperfec-
tion of its rhyme seems but to accentuate its note
of utter sincerity; it suggests the broken speech of
sorrow.

152 *When the sheep are in the fauld, and the kye at
hame,*

It is strange that of the two most tragic themes in
human life, that of the older wife who has lost the
love of her young husband, and that of the young
wife whose older husband stands between her and
love, Shakespeare should have touched neither,
though he had personal experience of the first, of
which Mr. Hardy has written very movingly in
Two on A Tower.

It was fitting that a woman should win immortality by a poem on the second theme and should utterly outdo a poet on his own ground. For the nine stanzas of *Auld Robin Gray* are worth *Enoch Arden* as many times over as a diamond outvalues the lustres of a chandelier.

The most marvellous thing in the poem is its artistic restraint; there is none of the relief that comes with passionate outcry; the tale, though spoken in the first person, is told so simply and so quietly that it sounds almost as impersonal and even unemotional as if related by a detached observer. For by imaginative intuition the artist knew that

Hopeless grief is passionless ;
That only men incredulous of despair,
Half-taught in anguish, through the midnight air
Beat upward to God's throne in loud access
Of passion and reproach.

And so the last note of the poem is as hopeless as it is gentle and sweet.

153 *Duncan Gray cam here to woo,*

For such a sunken soul what place in Heaven?
For such a soaring soul what room in Hell?
Or in some lone mid-region must he dwell?

These lines from a sonnet of James Ashcroft Noble, beginning

A dubious, strange, uncomprehended life,
A roll of riddles with no answer found,

which I would I might quote in full, inevitably suggest themselves when the first stanza of *Duncan Gray* follows so closely upon the last of *Highland Mary*. Yet the conjunction is not more strange than many to be found in Shakespeare's sonnets; and it reminds us that Burns shares with Shakespeare the gift of universality. He has all things for

all men, not merely for all individuals but for the cosmos that is each one of us. We all like to be preached at and told we are sad dogs; and Burns gives us a sermon which makes us at once repent and hug ourselves. We all really want to be good and yet we are contemptuous of the unco guid; and Burns expresses for us both our aspirations and our sneers. We all have memories of which we are ashamed; and it comforts our self-respect to know that Burns had them too. Of him more than of all the great poets but Shakespeare we feel that with all his greatness he shared and sympathized with the littleness of our common humanity.

156 *John Anderson my jo, John,*

MR. Chesterton might have quoted this poem as well as Kingsley's *Young and Old* (No. 359), as the most moving and convincing argument for marriage. Burns afterwards epitomized it and his experience of life in the immortal stanza:

To make a happy household clime
For weans and wife:
That's the true pathos and sublime
Of human life.

LINE 4. *brent*: unwrinkled.

8. *jo*: sweetheart—from *joie*, reminding us of the close connexion between France and Scotland.

158 *Ye distant spires, ye antique towers*

THERE IS a greater wealth of language and a finer discrimination in selection from it, but not, I think, more originality in conception or more deeply studied thoughts, than any distinguished 'old boy' might think necessary and attainable in an address to the present scholars. He would naturally make pious reference to 'Our Founder', wistfully allude to his own boyish memories, devote a considerable

space to sports, and elaborate the *paterfamilias* fiction of schooldays being the happiest part of life, and then go on to warn them of the dangers of the world, but unlike Gray, to explain his own success in avoiding them—except the malady that racks the joints, on which he would keep silence.

He would have prepared or be provided with a few epigrammatically pointed phrases suitable for quotation in the next morning's papers, as *Henry's holy shade, regardless of their doom the little victims play, where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise.*

But almost the only conception of Gray's beyond his thought would be that in lines 91-4; though the grim impressiveness of the ninth stanza would be equally beyond his expressive powers.

Yet a great poet ought to compare more favourably with, say, the President of the Board of Education, or the Chief Rabbi.

LINE 3. *Science*: learning, knowledge.

4. *Henry*. the Sixth, founder of Eton College.

5-10. This kind of inversion which obscures without beautifying is merely perversion, and gives the ungodly an excuse to scoff at poetry as mere affectation of language. Further perplexity is added because *turf*, *shade*, and *flowers* do not correspond in order with *lawn*, *grove*, and *mead* to which they refer.

12. *beloved in vain*: because the friends he had made there were dead or estranged; Tennyson, who had loved and lost, knew better.

28. *succeed*: are my successors.

31-40. while some study, others break bounds; *fearful joy* is an oxymoron very expressive of the truant's feelings.

47. *cheer*: looks, expression of face.

55-9. Gray is not, as some schoolboys have hastily supposed, depicting the Masters, but intro-

ducing the long list of personified evils which is continued through the next three stanzas.

60. Warn them that, being men, they are born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward.

61-90. *vultures*: an impressive metaphor. The care and skill with which the most appropriate epithets are selected so that the passions shall be most perfectly discriminated reveals a fine and sensitive artistic conscience. No amount of 'dredging the dictionary for adjectives' could improve upon this choice. *These* (line 61), *this* (line 71), and *those* (line 75) indicate the individuals upon whom Gray's prophetic eye has rested in apportioning the calamities.

99, 100. The epigram has biblical warrant (*Eccles.* i. 18), but is contradicted by the proverb 'forewarned is forearmed'.

159 *Daughter of Jove, relentless power,*

THE verses seem to invite notes mainly of an elucidatory nature.

LINE 1. *Daughter of Jove*: ordained by Providence.

11. *birth*: new-born child.

22. *summer friend*: fair-weather friend.

36. *vengeful band*. the Furies who punish the faults of men.

43. *Thy philosophic train*: knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, which by those who, like Gray, have never suffered it are supposed to attend upon adversity.

47, 48. Straightened, the convoluted inversion means 'Teach me to see justly my own defects, to be sensitive to others' personalities, and to know what it is to be a man'. He probably had in mind the 'homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto' of Terence.

160 *I am monarch of all I survey,*

SELKIRK was marooned on Juan Fernandez 1704, and his experience suggested the tale of Crusoe. Cowper's swiftly-coursing anapaests are a very unsuitable medium to convey the spirit of his hero's lamentations. The verses are indeed more pious than poetical, and one is tempted to sympathize with the philistine who quoted line 16 to express his opinion of them.

161 *Mary! I want a lyre with other strings,*

THIS masterly example finely illustrates the artistic principles on which sonnet structure is impregnably based, the first of which is that of unity in variety: the sonnet has two unequal parts differently rhymed, yet the two are but the complements of the single effort by which a poet at once and spontaneously delivers himself of the impulse of some one, powerful idea; structure is indeed a misleading metaphor, for a perfect sonnet must seem not to have been built but *cast*, in a single operation. The perfection of Cowper's is flawed by division into three parts instead of two (to be Three yet One is an attribute of Divinity alone). But though the detached couplet is a blemish alike to eye and ear, the unity of thought in the poem is whole and unbroken. No poet so great was ever so little an artist, Blake alone excepted.

It is greatly to be regretted that Palgrave's imperfect appreciation of the nature of the sonnet led him to print his examples in forms that do not express the relation between octave and sestet. Cf. note to No. 166.

The first line is noteworthy for its highly significant admission; Cowper had the soul of a great poet but he lacked full mastery of that poetic technique by means of which alone the vision of

the spirit and its accompanying emotion can be communicated. When that communication is perfectly conveyed, that is when technique is transcendent, the effect is that of inspiration, as though some divine power had touched both eyes and lips. This is the reason that in the presence of the greatest poetry we are thrilled with a mysterious sense of 'moving about in worlds not realized', of a feeling as if the veil of reality had suddenly trembled. Unlike the child in the temple we hear the voice of a man, and are thrilled for a moment as if the call were divine.

The *wings* of line 5 are those by which the poetic soul rises into the visionary world to find inspiration.

162 *The twentieth year is well-nigh past*

THE mould into which these most pathetic and melancholy reflections are cast is almost identical with that in which Campbell reproduces the rush and roar of the battle of Hohenlinden (No. 212). And though Campbell is the lesser poet, no one can doubt that his is the better choice. These swiftly moving, swiftly rhyming, four-stressed lines have always been the poets' discriminating or instinctive choice for verse that shall be a natural medium for a sense of swiftly moving action. The oldest ballads were written in them, and so is *Marmion*; Byron chose it expressly for its swiftness. Nothing can make Cowper's stanzas fit their theme; he is as handicapped as a pierrot preaching a funeral sermon. And yet his feeling is so sincere and strong that its pathos *does* communicate itself, as music comes even out of a school piano when Miss Spooner plays it. The difference between his stanza and Campbell's, apparently so slight, is vastly disproportionate in its effect. In *Hohenlinden* the odd

line at once echoes the burden of the others and serves as a pause for the rallying of force for the next stanza. But in *My Mary* the repetition acts like a constant brake, ever checking at short intervals the natural forward rush of the lines and so keeping down the sense of pace. In this they are aided, in the stanzas that move us most, e.g. the second, eighth, ninth, and last, by the numerous long vowels and by their spacing among the consonants, so that often two or more have to be formed before the breath is released by the next vowel.

Mrs. Mary Unwin was Cowper's devoted friend, and had tenderly cared for him when he suffered from an attack of insanity twenty years before the date of the poem, 1793. In 1792 she began herself to fail rapidly in mind and body.

163 *Why, Damon, with the forward day*

He took a spring and danced around
Beneath the gallows tree.

This is the music to which Marvell set those other 'Thoughts in a Garden' (No. 111). Here it has a strange effectiveness, arising not from its appropriateness but from the contrast with its grim theme.

It is a grisly jest; but the elderly may think it in doubtful taste, and the young will miss the point of it.

164 *In the downhill of life, when I find I'm declining,*

IF there is anything more incomprehensible than the presence of these verses in a Golden Treasury, it is the considerations which led Palgrave to characterize them as 'this truly noble poem . . . exhibiting a rare excellence—the climax of simple sublimity'.

The ideals and sentiments of a retired pork-butcher are expressed in the rhythm and rhymes appropriate to a comic song intended for a banjo accompaniment.

Behold, I show you a mystery: these very sentiments and wishes are expressed by Pope and Rogers in two poems (Nos. 118, 145) where every one finds them delightful. For the ideals in themselves are no more essentially vulgar than a pork-butcher is; indeed, one who is said to have begun life in that very occupation kept them always in mind and at last realized them 'the latter part of his life was spent, as all men of good sense will wish theirs may be, in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends. He had the good fortune to gather an estate equal to his occasion, and, in that, to his wish; and is said to have spent some years before his death at his native Stratford.'

It is not the ideas but the vulgarity of their expression that offends us in *To-morrow*. Pork is pork whether roasted or raw: but until the art of the cook has done its part upon it, none but the barbarian can find enjoyment in it.

165 *Life! I know not what thou art,*

IF a child ever 'lisp'd in numbers' on such a subject, these lines, with their naïve innocence of all the philosophers, might be the result. But the lovely rhythms of the last four lines could only come to a child inspired.

166 *Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold*

THE first example of a perfect sonnet in this collection; for Milton's have either some slight variation from the ideal type or lack the burning enthusiasm which, though completely controlled and disciplined,

suffuses every noble sonnet with its impassioned glow. The single thought with which the poet's mind is full-charged, the splendour of Chapman's Homer, pours itself into the mould of the octave and fills it with a rush of lovely memories culminating in the new and superlative experience. Then, inspired by the same instinct that led the Hebrew poets to parallelism, it moulds in the sestet the image which its own enthusiasm has created, and ends, as all great sonnets end, with a sense of absolute completeness and of the quiet that accompanies it.

The central climax is artistically necessary too because the impassioned 'heart must pause to breathe'; Milton tended to avoid it, for it was not necessary to the cooler thought of most of his sonnets, which have rather the even flow of an ode of Horace.

The common rhyme which links its fourth and fifth lines is vital to the sonnet as the means by which the sense of unity in the octave is secured; so the separately completed quatrains of the Shakespearian form, ever ending and beginning again, are fatal to its unity; and the concluding couplet not only emphasizes its discontinuity but spoils its natural close by a sudden application of the brake. A great sonnet does not end but dies away into silence, leaving us still listening.

serene: the clear air of high places; but the word is also charged with a sense of the calm of lofty spirits. This power of selecting words so as to suggest ideas even nobler than those they express is the essential gift of the great poet.

Stout Cortez, the Spaniard whom Keats supposed to be the first European to cross Central America and have sight of the Pacific Ocean from the crest of a mountain range in Darien. As lords can do without challenge what would be ridiculed

in lesser men, so a lord of language like Keats can take a ludicrous epithet and apply it so that we utterly forget all its implications but those which we instantly recognize as appropriate to the character and physique of Cortez.

167 *Bards of Passion and of Mirth*

As the impulse which moved Keats to create the last poem came from Homer through Chapman's translation, so here *L'Allegro* supplied the stimulus and suggested the form, and even perhaps awoke the aspiration to reveal the poet's delight in his visions, not of this world, as *L'Allegro* does, but of the spiritual world. But though the form of the instrument is common property, the music breathed into it is Keats's own, and his method of lending variety to it, by the frequent use of feminine rhymes and by 'running on' the sense from one couplet to another, is, if not his own, original in its results. What is said of the nightingale in lines 17-22 has some bearing upon Keats himself. He imagines that the song of the heavenly nightingale is not the dream-music without intelligible sense, of the earthly bird, but a revelation of spiritual truth. It has often been alleged against Keats that he would have agreed with Flaubert 'un beau vers qui ne signifie rien est supérieur à un vers moins beau qui signifie quelque chose'. These lines prove that neither kind satisfied him. The only melody in which he could rest content was that of the heavenly nightingale, in which 'beauty is truth, truth beauty', and the highest effort of his genius was to translate that music in his most marvellous Ode (No. 244).

double-lived: because the spirits of dead poets live both in men's memories on earth and also in heaven.

senseless, tranced: trance=transit; to Keats the nightingale seems to have passed into some other state of being and to be insensible to its bodily surroundings; so to this world its song is unintelligible.

168 *All thoughts, all passions, all delights,*

GOLD is concentrated worth; and that enshrined in a Treasury should have no admixture of less valuable ore. The poem, though, like everything of Coleridge, it contains gold, is not gold all through. Its first stanza is a statement, as imperishable as it is complete, concise and assured, of Love's supreme and all-pervading power. But the narrative told in illustration is out of place here. The mere narration of events employs too many words, and, which is worse, *poor* words, i.e. words which have no value but the immediate one of conveying a meaning, without any secondary and more poetic suggestion. The music, too, of such verse must necessarily have the simple, freely moving rhythm which carries on the story easily and pleasantly but does not entrance our ears with its own subtleties and hold us back to listen to it. Much of it in this poem is mere jog-trot, which conveys meaning without reinforcing it or helping to produce an emotional reaction to it. In all this *Love* differs entirely from *The Ancient Mariner*, which is not a narrative but a vision, like Dante's. It is not told in verse but conjured up before us by the spell of music, scene by scene—if those can be called scenes which have no more to do with this world than the Book of Revelation. This story can be read with interest by any one in his senses. But the story of the *Ancient Mariner* is mere delirium to any one who has not surrendered his mind to the intoxication of musical magic.

169 *O talk not to me of a name great in story ;*

SEE No. 83, lines 11, 12; and cf. the rhythm of 'Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen' (*School for Scandal*, III. iii).

170 *O Brignall banks are wild and fair,*

SEE note to 168.

171 *There be none of Beauty's daughters*

THE charm of the music owes a good deal to the variety produced by the mixture of feminine with masculine rhymes and the occasional anapaests. The similes are also beautiful.

172 *I arise from dreams of thee*

IN this, as in the last poem, there is a new voice singing, very different from anything that the eighteenth century heard. The unfailing regularity of pattern aimed at in the eighteenth-century line is broken and gone. Cowper might use anapaests and dactyls, but he never mixed them with iambs and trochees as is done here. His contemporaries assumed that the music of verse depended upon every line having its fixed number of syllables which, as a rule, should be alternately stressed and unstressed; they even used 'numbers', i.e. lines of numbered syllables, as another name for verse. But the generation which discovered that 'man was born free, and is everywhere in chains' discovered too that human speech cannot be measured off as if it were meaningless syllables like *tee* and *tum*; they understood as well as their predecessors that an ordered system was as necessary to verse as to communities; but they made their verse-patterns by counting not the syllables but the stresses in the line.

There is here too a freedom allowed to passion

which would equally have surprised the colder and more formal eighteenth century, when men were called 'Mr.' by their wives and 'Sir' by their children, and 'enthusiasm' was a word of reproach.

174 *She was a phantom of delight*

Two voices are there · one is of the deep.
The other is an old, half-witted sheep—
And, Wordsworth, both are thine.

As was fitting, this poem which here introduces Wordsworth's poetry illustrates both voices, and also gives some indication of their relative proportions in Wordsworth's work. No poet but Wordsworth would ever, in love and in a love poem, have thought or spoken of a lovely girl as a piece of machinery (line 22). That Hamlet does so, sneeringly, of his own too solid flesh (II. ii. 124), only makes the matter worse. But Wordsworth had a theory which he sometimes forced into his poetry that there is no essential difference between the language of poetry and the ordinary language of prose; this example both convinces us that there is a difference and suggests in what that difference consists. The word 'machine' would perfectly describe the girl's body upon which an anatomist was writing; it would adequately convey his thought of it to his reader; and it is only with his thought of it that he and they are concerned. But the purpose of poetry is not, like that of ordinary prose, to convey thought alone: it is to communicate also the emotions which the thoughts have stirred. And therefore it selects only such thoughts as have an emotional accompaniment and only such words as are suggestive of it. *Machine* is devoid of emotional suggestion: its associations are utterly different from those which a love poem should recall to our imaginations in order to awaken appropriate emo-

tions; and when we come upon it here we are bewildered like one rudely awaked from a dream, 'in sleep a king, but, waking, no such matter'. Yet as we are consoled if we find our mother standing by our bed, so, in spite of such shocks, we gain from Wordsworth more than from any other poet the sense of absolute assurance that poetry, like the Great Mother herself, 'never did betray the heart that loved her'.

177 *She dwelt among the untrodden ways*

WORDSWORTH'S theory of poetry agreed with Bacon's of prose, that a writer should 'think as wise men think and speak as the common people speak'; but his practice, so well illustrated by this lovely poem, agreed with Shakespeare's, whose language, as Mr. Shaw discovered in Johnson's *Preface*, has 'so much ease and simplicity that it seems scarcely to merit the claim of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation'. To speak as the common people speak might conceivably be of service to a Salvation Army preacher; it would be impossible to a poet. What Wordsworth admired in the vulgar tongue were the qualities which, by the time he was born, English poetry had almost entirely lost, the power to use everyday words to move the hearts of simple men, and 'make familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar'. But in his theory he forgot that though this spell is most potent in simple words, its magic only answers to certain combinations of selections from them; rye and barley are the simply beautiful names of common, lovely grasses, but it was in the mysterious nature of things that sesame alone should have the power of a charm.

So, here, it is by means of the 'diligent selection' of everyday words which his poetic instinct told

him were potent to stir the imagination and fill it with suggestions of far more than the mere meaning tells, that Wordsworth holds us entranced.

178 *I travell'd among unknown men*

179 *Three years she grew in sun and shower;*

IT might have been observed that Cowper, with whose poems the last book ended, does no homage to the heathen gods who had for so long presided over English poetry. In this he anticipates the feeling and spirit of the new century. Keats in the first poem of this book salutes Apollo, but offers sacrifice to the manes of Homer. But henceforth 'the Oracles are dumb'.

The French Revolution had suddenly made all men realize what only the thinkers had understood before, that, in Selden's words, 'a king is a thing men have made for their own sake, for quietness' sake', that authority 'doth hold or break as men are strong or weak', and that

The same arts that did gain
A power, must it maintain.

It was a time when men were ready to serve upon all authority a writ of *quo warranto*, to ask of priest, peer, or poet 'by what authority doest thou these things?' So the ancient standards by which poetry had been judged were themselves brought to judgement. It was resolved that their influence upon English poetry had increased, was increasing, and ought to be restrained; that their rules were arbitrary, useless, and ought to be abolished. Shakespeare, whose ignorance of them had been a reproach in his own century and the following one, now became the new standard. for he had looked into his heart to write instead of studying the ancient models, and he had found his themes in the

national story more than in the legends of Greece and Rome. For the ambition of Napoleon had provoked a great outburst of national consciousness in England, so that men said, even to poetry, 'look homeward, angel, now'.

And poets who looked homeward found the loveliest land in the world, and one of the most romantic of national histories, to inspire them. So the writers of the age, represented by the greatest of them, Wordsworth and Scott, found alike in Nature and in the traits of their own countrymen an inexhaustible store out of which to create and to people a visionary world.

There could be no better introduction to Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature than the second of these poems affords.

Although Wordsworth is the poet least likely to employ artifice consciously, it should be noticed how the rhythm of line 14 bounds as it were from the short vowel to the long and takes a spring at the beginning of line 15, while the alliteration of *b*, *m*, and *s* produces a fitting contrast in the quiet of the following lines. A poet like Gray, in the effort of so perfectly delivering himself, might say 'with a great price bought I this freedom'; Wordsworth could quietly have answered, 'but I was free born'. All his greatest things, like Shakespeare's, seem to have the spontaneity of Nature itself, the notion clothes itself like the lilies, without any appearance of the poet's taking thought 'what it shall put on'. So in the most marvellous stanza of all, the fifth, we are not only told of and made to see but we actually *feel* suggested in the music the awe of midnight and the quiet of secret places and the dance of rivulets and the sound as of a hidden brook and the beauty that haunts some faces; but of the art which accomplishes the miracle we see nothing; it eludes our analysis; and the technical criticism which pries into

the effect of the extra syllable in *rivulets* and the alliteration of *s* in *secret place* seems almost paltry.

LINE 8. *law and impulse*: cf. restrain and kindle of line 12.

19. The beauty of the clouds appealed strongly to Wordsworth.

180 *A slumber did my spirit seal;*

ANY great poet is like no one but himself; of any poem, almost of any line, we feel that no other than he could have written it. Yet, like ourselves, each has more in common with some natures than with others; and Wordsworth, totally different from Milton as an artist, had much in common with him as a man. Both natures were marked with a certain austerity and aloofness from the interests of smaller men; we do not feel with them, as we do with Shakespeare, for example, that in spite of their greatness they could sympathize with our littleness. For both of them lacked the sense of humour which puts great and small at ease together, the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin; and both lacked to some extent the human pathos which generally accompanies it.

The importance of this little poem, therefore, is that it reveals to us a real and deep tenderness in Wordsworth's nature underlying his austere loftiness. It proves that he too had loved and lost and known the sweets and the bitterness of love, and that he was not too cold and reserved to appeal for human sympathy. The simple, natural pathos of these lines and of the last two in No. 177, which refer to the same sorrow, make them as touching as almost any in English poetry to those who remember how strong and reticent a nature is speaking in them.

LINE 1. I was blind to any thought of what might be in store.

With lines 7, 8 cf. 'She is in her grave', No. 177. The effort required to sound the open vowels and the rolling *r*'s and *d*'s gives a sense of force to the lines which suggests the irresistible progress of some huge Juggernaut car.

181 *A Chieftain to the Highlands bound*

A COMPARISON between this not unsuccessful attempt to recapture the spirit of the ballad, and Morris's 'Haystack in the Floods' (No. 389) will afford a most interesting exercise in criticism. The stories, different as they are, have far more in common than the treatment. The ballad tells us the events; but Morris is much more concerned with the minds of those affected by them. Johnson drew a similar, but less just, contrast between the novels of Fielding and Richardson. It is, of course, Morris's success in achieving the higher and more difficult aim which makes his poem incomparably greater and more impressive than Campbell's. For what takes place within us matters much more than what goes on without; since

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven

The ninth line, helped by the alliteration (because a thing once done is more easily done again), moves as swiftly as the fugitives.

182 *'Why weep ye by the tide, ladie?'*

SEE Note to 181. Scott's novels interest us far more than his poetry because in them he is more interested to reveal the personalities of his characters than simply to explain what happened to them: for men are loved or disliked and despised or pitied far more for what they are than for what they do or suffer; because by what they feel and think rather than by what they do we compare them

with ourselves. Thus to all but children *Guy Mannering* is a much more interesting work than *Ivanhoe*, and *Ivanhoe* than *Marmion*.

LINE 19. *managed* : trained.

183 *How delicious is the winning*

BURNS, who knew all this better than Campbell, gave the result of his experience in *An Epistle to a Young Friend*:

I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard of concealing,
But, Och! it hardens a' within
And petrifies the feeling!

and in *John Anderson*, No. 156; with which compare No. 359, and lines 89-92 of No. 147.

The beautiful and effective pictures of impossibility in the fourth and sixth stanzas should be compared with those in the last stanza of No. 80.

184 *The fountains mingle with the river*

THE juxtaposition of this with Campbell's poem is of course intentional. Campbell represents the poetry of the previous century, which either ignored love or played with it as beneath the consideration of serious men. Even in the great eighteenth-century novels love is a poor earthly thing that has lost its wings and its torch.

Now the poets of the new century were to reidealize it, as 'the vision and the faculty divine' by which the world is transfigured, through its inspiration of the artist and the poet. Which is what is meant by the Romantic Revival.

187 *Gem of the crimson-colour'd Even,*

188 *Swiftly walk over the western wave,*

THE juxtaposition again affords an instructive contrast between the dying and the newly born poetry.

Campbell clings to the outworn devices by which poetic diction, i.e. phrases used so often in verse and nowhere else that they had come to be accepted as poetical, is used to disguise poverty of thought, conventional personification to conceal weakness of imagination, and smoothness of metre takes the place of musical rhythm. In the first stanza, for example, we are asked to think of a star both as a gem and a person, of day as a person though the name is printed without a capital, and of evening as crimson though, unlike day, it has a capital as if it were a person too. The reader who surrenders his judgement to magic gains by the exchange, but all this is the contortions of the sybil without the inspiration.

It is a relief to turn the page and come at once into the presence of poetic reality, to see, and to feel, night stride across the sky, and to know exactly how the poet felt towards her, and to exchange the monotonous perfection of metre for the natural vigour of Shelley's varied rhythm. His first line startles us out of the lethargy induced by Campbell's vague murmurings. how is it to be read? A comparison with the first lines of other stanzas, e.g. the second and fifth, shows clearly that it should have four stresses; these can only make a 'repeat pattern' if they fall on the syllables *swift*, *ov*, *west*, and *wave*; and this pattern lends emphasis to the most important word in the line, *swift*, so that meaning and metre reinforce one another. Similarly in line 15 the stresses fall on *when*, *rose*, *saw*, and *dawn*, and in the more difficult line 22 on *thy* (lightly struck), *Death*, *came*, *cried*—with a pause instead of an unaccented syllable between *death* and *came*.

This irregularity would have been abominable to the sophisticated ear of the eighteenth century, but it really adds power to beauty, for the sense of

pleasure that comes from an ordered plan is never lost and yet variety and emphasis are gained, for the natural speech rhythms harmonize with the pattern. The new music which Shelley brought into English poetry was born of the instinct which told him that though regular stresses were essential to a pattern they might vary very considerably in force without destroying the sense of form.

LINE 4. The reader of Shelley must bring to him 'an eye that watches and receives'; here again the rhythm rebukes lethargy; the natural emphasis evokes the music, the stresses falling on *where*, *long*, *lone*, the fourth being divided, as it were, to make *daylight* a spondee of two lightly stressed syllables. The music, so rendered, lingers on the tongue and on the ear as Night lingered in her cave.

10. The first stress falls on *blind* and so emphasizes the request.

19. *Day* and *turned* are stressed, a pause taking the place of a syllable between them.

22. Cf. No. 28, l. 8, and No. 35, l. 2.

24. So *child* and *Sleep* are stressed, not *sweet*, which having the same vowel sound as *sleep* would be inharmonious if stressed. Note the magical epithet *filmy-eyed*.

27. *wouldst* and *me* are stressed both for emphasis and melody.

29. Death comes to the dying in the hour before the dawn.

31. He will sleep when the dawn breaks.

189 *Why art thou silent? Is thy love a plant*

190 *When we two parted*

IN theme and mood the two poems have a good deal in common both with one another and with some of Shakespeare's sonnets, e.g. Nos. 10, 11, 13,

but in music and imagery Wordsworth is far closer to Shakespeare than Byron. His comparison of a heart numbed by cold neglect to the nest once full of warm tenderness and now with snow is essentially Shakespearian in its power of carrying truth instantaneously into the heart, whether or not one has actually seen the thing described; and each of his other figures could be matched in Shakespeare by any curious seeker. But Byron's music neither Shakespeare nor Wordsworth ever played. Dactyls have a swiftness of movement that should make them very unsuitable to suggest a mood of despondency and gloom; and yet that mood is here, heavy as frost. Speed has somehow become converted into restrained power, and the result is more impressive than the naturally slow line, as a soldier's charger reined back to a funeral pace is more impressive than the usual sable hearse-horses. How the thing is done is far less obvious; the long vowels play their part; the short lines, by constantly 'pulling up' the dactyls, prevent them from gathering speed; and the breaking of the second dactyl in each line, giving the voice a single syllable to pause upon, has also a marked effect upon the pace. Byron shows a similar mastery in his control of the metre in *The Destruction of Sennacherib*.

191 *In a drear-nighted December,*

THE repeated feminine rhymes help to make the softness and sweetness of the melody. The rhyming of the last line in each stanza gives unity to the whole.

LINE 4. *green felicity*: only a poet in a poetic age could imagine an abstract idea invested with concrete attributes, and so concentrate a picture and its emotional suggestions in a phrase. The eighteenth

century could neither have conceived nor appreciated it.

6. *with a*: the two syllables spoken in the time normally allowed for one make the line open with a gust of wind.

14. *fretting*: two suggestions—material, of chafing the banks, and spiritual, of chafing against delay.

15. *petting*: complaining.

23. *numbéd*: cf. ll. 7, 16.

192 *Where shall the lover rest*

THE swift dactylic movement is finely appropriate to the rush and energy in the images of the two last stanzas, but is ill suited to suggest the restfulness and pathos of the others.

LINE 9. *eleu loro*. el-ee-u; musical syllables with long, open vowels, expressive of grief.

193 *'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,*

THE representative poem of the Romantic Movement; and, in the judgement of many, the very touchstone of pure poetry, the intuition of which is that here we have no abiding city, but are strangers and sojourners in an unintelligible world; that we are as it were under a spell, and that by a spell, if we could but find the true magic, we might be released and recover our true personality and our true home. To those who can say, like Dr Dodd, 'No! No! This has been a very agreeable world to me,' all this will be incomprehensible, they may appreciate the imagery of the *Ode to Autumn*, but never the pure magic of *La Belle Dame*, they will understand Coleridge's *Love*, but never realize that all its romance is here concentrated and sublimated. Even that other world of Milton's vision has more affinity with earth than this of Keats; and men may

love the beauty of the one poet and be insensible to the magic of the other.

Knight at arms. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, one at home in the world, the other, like Hamlet, an alien in it, represent humanity, and the readers of Keats. To those for whom Don Quixote is a jest, knight at arms will mean cavalryman. To others it means the chivalrous, romantic, and visionary aspirations in each one of us.

LINE 2. Music and image are inseparable; *palely* is with Blake's 'burning' tiger, the most marvellous word a poet ever made.

With the picture in lines 3-8, cf. No. 28.

4. As Milton's flames made darkness visible, so these four monosyllables make silence felt.

9-12. Keats shows us a lily and a rose: and our imagination instantaneously shows us the form and spirit of a man.

all day long: the sound is like the time.

25. These things are not the sustenance of this world.

kisses four: Keats, in one of his letters, found a reason for the number, but not the true one, which is that four is here a sacramental number.

37-40. The repetition of *pale* invests the vision with the impressiveness of Dante.

starved: so much power of suggestion has seldom been concentrated in a single word. Reinforced by *gapéd* the image is as terrible as any in literature.

48. The rest is silence.

195 *When the lamp is shattered,*

THE free rhythms here, harmonizing with, but not subordinated to the verse pattern, should be compared with those in No. 188. See Notes to that poem. The theme is the sad one, that, as a French writer has said, we have no more control over the

duration of our passions than we have over the duration of our lives. Rossetti has poems on the same thought, 'A little while, a little love', and 'Never happy any more'.

LINES 19, 20. Of the two now 'singled', i.e. estranged from one another, that one whose love failed must suffer as an affliction the love it once joyed in possessing; or, perhaps, must suffer from the thought that, having loved, it does so no longer. Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway are supposed to be an illustrative case. Shelley's own certainly was.

24. All three metaphors refer to the human heart.

196 *O lovers' eyes are sharp to see,*

197 *Earl March look'd on his dying child,*

READ together the two poems give the whole sad story.

198 *Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art—*

199 *When I have fears that I may cease to be*

BOTH sonnets are of the Shakespearian form, and in both the influence of Shakespeare is clearly seen; but only the second bears the stamp of that 'fundamental brainwork' which Rossetti declared to be the mark of Shakespeare's sonnets. To envy a star's unwearied contemplation of the beauty of the sleeping earth and then to choose instead an interminable sensuous stimulus is to be not Shakespearian but decadent. One would not willingly believe that this was all Keats meant when he sighed for 'a life of sensations rather than thoughts'. The second sonnet, however, though several of its lines derive their rhythm directly from Shakespeare, is no mere copy of him, but in vigour and originality of conception is worthy to stand beside his best.

- 200 *Surprised by joy—impatient as the wind—*
201 *At the mid hour of night, when stars are weeping,*
202 *And thou art dead, as young and fair*

POETS of the first, third, and second rank are here represented, but only Moore's poem represents him at his best. Wordsworth's is not a fine sonnet; its octave is irregular in its rhyme plan and does not correspond with a completed turn of his thought; moreover, he allows his reference to the tomb to lead him down a side issue: that a person once in the tomb is safe from further calamities is not relevant to that main argument on which the whole power of the sonnet should be concentrated. *Least division of an hour* is a cumbrous phrase for 'a moment' and is merely brought in for the rhyme. Line 13 is a very weak one, for at that present moment the face had not passed from his sight, and even if he means 'living face' the statement is perilously near to a platitude.

Byron's poem is characteristic of the egotism that marked his work, but not of his nobler qualities. His verse trots briskly along like John Gilpin, indeed the opening quatrain of his last stanza might be inserted at the end of Cowper's poem as 'Gilpin's farewell to his steed'; no genuine sorrow is profaned by such a suggestion: this is merely the sentimentality which made Sterne weep over a dead ass, not because the ass was dead but because he enjoyed 'to sigh yet feel no pain; to weep yet scarce know why'. Palgrave commends the 'strong thought and close reasoning'; but the thought is the obvious thought of a selfish man, and the reasons such as selfishness could easily find to justify itself.

Moore's poem is a pathetic little song, exquisitely suitable for a musical setting; it therefore fulfils its purpose more completely than either of the other two poems.

LINE 18. (No. 202) 'What I loved has now become nothingness.' But real love has never believed this; and even Byron in his last lines seems to contradict it.

203 *One word is too often profaned*

The last four lines crystallize the feelings and beliefs of the Romantic Revival about the meaning of love, religion, romance, art, and poetry. This is indeed one of the most significant stanzas, not in Shelley's works only, but in all English literature.

204 *Pibroch of Donuil Dhu,*

AN admirable example of the power of dactyls to communicate a sense of swift motion. The last two stanzas are particularly noteworthy.

205 *A wet sheet and a flowing sea,*

206 *Ye Mariners of England*

207 *Of Nelson and the North*

THREE poems of the sea, good, better, best: because the spirit of the sea and those who sail upon it is felt in all three in the movement of the verse as well as in its words; more in the second than in the first, and most in the third. In the rhythm of all three there is the free movement and power of the sea; but the music of the second expresses also the determination of seamen; and in the third there is the pathos of the sea as well. The images, too, become more striking from poem to poem; if, as has been said, the final test of a work of art is its impressiveness, the *Battle of the Baltic* is a great poem.

NOTES TO 205

sheet: the rope by which the sail is fastened; if a boat heeled over far enough it would be wetted.

LINES 9-12. The contrast between the sound of *soft and gentle*, and *snoring and heaving* reinforces the contrast in the images.

NOTES TO 206

LINES 7-10. The open vowels give the lines the energy of which they speak.

meteor: a vivid metaphor, and finely appropriate to the British flag in which red predominates, and which is supposed to inspire awe.

34. The introduction of *s*'s hushes the music to its peaceful conclusion.

NOTES TO 207

THE stanza-form is admirably chosen: the anapaests lend force and sweep to the verse, but the short lines check its pace and give dignity of movement; some of the anapaests, too, allow us to read them as trochees if the sense requires a slower movement. Thus in line 2 we have the choice of, *sing the glorious day's renown*, and *sing the glorious day's renown*, where obviously the second rendering is to be preferred. In the next line *when to battle* is probably more expressive than the alternative *when to battle*. This flexibility of the form, the power of the pattern to accommodate itself to the sense, is not the least striking feature of the poem. The long fifth line serves as a climax towards which the first half of each stanza works up; and the sustained rhyme of the next three lines works up similarly to the emphatic final.

LINE 6 Cannon were then fired by means of a lighted fuse.

16. The effect of the alliteration of *s* and *d* should be noted; it gives the line the sound of an impressive whisper.

68. The abandonment of the anapaests gives a new and appropriate music to this line.

70. The one blemish on the poem; *condole* cannot be used intransitively, and *mermaids* are perhaps out of place among these stern realities.

208 *Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!*

THE Ode is a sermon in verse, like Longfellow's 'Psalm of Life', but more profound in its thought and more impressive in its language. But though a noble sermon it is not a high, imaginative creation, and therefore it is not a great poem. In one stanza only the poet sees truth by the light of vision rather than discovers it by the process of thought. But it is by virtue of that stanza, in which he sees, and shows us, Law as the eternal principle of the universe, preserving order and beauty in every part of it, that his poem lives and moves and has its being in our hearts and will continue to do so as long as men read poetry. The rest is argument and to be met with counter-argument, e.g. that great men are essentially rebels and small men unquestioning slaves, and that duty has inspired persecutors as well as martyrs; but there is no arguing with a lightning flash that reveals the foundations of the world.

Voice of God: conscience; the metaphor has no great poetical force, for it needs no high imaginative vision to recognize conscience as the voice of God—nor duty as a light to guide.

LINES 4-8. Man's innate sense of eternal justice makes him feel that he who faithfully serves duty shall not need to be disquieted.

9-24. Some rare and happy natures cheerfully consecrate themselves to duty out of pure goodness

of heart; but if that instinct fails conscience must take its place.

25-40. He has tried to be a law to himself and to choose a way of life, but is now convinced that simply to do one's duty is the only sure road to peace of mind. *Unchartered freedom* is liberty of action without guidance: a charter gives rights but states the uses to which they should be put.

41-8. Duty, obedience to the law of one's being, is the fundamental principle of the universe, by which the stars move in their courses and the flowers appear in their seasons. It is significant that the last lines of this stanza, in their majestic rhythm and their deep-toned music, are incomparably the most impressive in the poem.

49-56. He commends himself to that Power 'whose service is perfect freedom'.

209 *Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!*

210 *Two Voices are there, one is of the Sea,*

Two voices, each a mighty voice but usually so dissimilar, are here in harmony. Both poems illustrate the essential characteristic of the sonnet: impassioned utterance dignified by the artistic restraint imposed by the form, completely expressed within the limits of fourteen lines. In both the theme divides naturally at the end of the octave; and in both, grandeur of imaginative thought is clothed with noble language. But here the greater poet asserts his supremacy; his is the organ voice that awes while it thrills, and stamps itself once and for ever upon the memory. Nothing in Byron's sonnet can compare in suggestive force with the last three lines of Wordsworth's. We feel the air shaken by the roar of the torrent and the thunder of the sea, and, in the last line, hear the rumbling echo of them die away into silence.

NOTES TO 209

Bonnivard: a Swiss patriot imprisoned by the Duke of Savoy.

LINES 3-6. *heart, fetters*: the effect of the repetition is a little weakened by the use of the device a second time.

NOTES TO 210

LINES 1-2. It is significant that Wordsworth was born near the sea and lived most of his life among the mountains.

6. Napoleon gained control of the Swiss government in 1802.

211 *Once did She hold the gorgeous East in fee,*
212 *O Friend! I know not which way I must look*
213 *Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour*
214 *When I have borne in memory what has tamed*

WORDSWORTH saw the beginnings of that industrial revolution which was to concentrate the nation's growing capital in the hands of a small wealthy class, and the four sonnets are the expression of his passionate conviction that 'there is no wealth but life, life including all its powers, of love, of joy, and admiration'. The first reminds England of the fate of Venice, corrupted by that materialism which the second deplures; the third and noblest holds up to her the austere example of one of her greatest sons; and the last and tenderest voices his deep love for his country and his confidence that she is worthy of it. The last two are technically the most perfect, for the first admits a third rhyme into the octave, and the second does not clearly divide into those two parts which are so admirably illustrated in the others. (See notes to Nos. 161, 166.)

Wordsworth shares with Milton the power of investing all his sonnets, great and lesser alike, with the essential characteristic of dignity, and also of striking that note unmistakably in the opening line, which is well illustrated here.

The figurative language in these four sonnets admirably illustrates the means by which a great poet concentrates a wealth of meaning in a few lines, 'infinite riches in a little room'. It is by the power of its figures that No. 213 is the finest of the fine group. *Fen*, for example, is a metaphor packed with powerful suggestions of material corruption, spiritual stagnation, and life-giving elements wasted.

Lines 3-4 afford striking examples of the effective use of metonymy, the altar picturing for us the priest and his duties, the sword the soldier, the fireside the family, the bower ladies, and the hall gentlemen—whose *wealth* here means well-being, heroic because mental and spiritual: the notion that riches meant wealth was the characteristic delusion of the industrial revolution.

The noble simile in line 9 recalls to our imaginations Milton's purity and splendour as well as his aloofness from petty things. The last line doubtless refers to his having once taught in school.

215 *On Landen, when the sun was low,*

216 *It was a summer evening,*

THE tumult and the shouting; and afterwards the quiet of a churchyard on a summer evening.

It is interesting to count the number of forcible *r*'s and *d*'s in *Hohenlinden* and the number of open vowels, and similarly the quiet *s*'s and *l*'s in *After Blenheim*. This, and the sustained rhyme, keeping the mind on the stretch by expectancy, and the recurring short line which seems at once an echo

and a rallying point, compared with the even pace of Kaspar's reminiscences, ever ended by the closing couplet and slowly beginning again, do something to explain the wonder of the contrast. The irony of Southey's eighth and ninth stanzas, so gentle that it has burnt to the bone almost before its touch is felt, is very rare in English poetry.

217 When he who adores thee has left but the name

THE natural rhythms of the sorrowful voice cannot be made to harmonize with the galloping rhythm of the verse, and so the pathos of the words loses force, instead of gaining it, from the form. The rhythm of the opening line, for example, corresponds exactly with 'I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris and he'; it is immediately obvious that Browning, not Moore, has chosen the form most expressive of his matter.

The invocation is addressed to Ireland by Robert Emmett, executed by the English government as one of the leaders of an unsuccessful rising in 1803.

218 Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,

THE poem owes its fame to its powerful imagery by which every scene is conjured up before us so that, as was said of Shakespeare's descriptions, 'the Thing he would represent stands full before you, and you possess every part of it'. But it was also said of Shakespeare that 'when he describes a thing you more than see it, you feel it too'. Now this power to thrill the nerves of feeling through the ear while presenting the picture to the eye resides mainly in the rhythm of the words which call up the picture. Wolfe's rhythm has that quality only in a very limited degree. We see his pictures so vividly that we are impressed and

moved by them; but we are not thrilled; there is no mysterious communication 'felt in the blood and felt along the heart'. There is a noble simplicity in the last line for example; yet the voice we hear has not the grave majestic power as of Death himself speaking, in

Duncan is in his grave:
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.

Every reader must admire the 'Burial of Sir John Moore', and very few will be disposed to ask of the poet a higher pleasure than he has given; but those few are the readers who have learned to recognize the Grand Style in literature.

Sir John Moore, having retreated from Madrid before the French in 1809 and reached the coast at Corunna, made a successful attempt to drive them back in order to embark his troops, but was himself wounded, and died before the embarkation was completed.

The second is the finest stanza alike in pictorial power and in the fitness of the music to its theme.

219 *In the sweet shire of Cardigan,*

'WORDS are the people's: yet there is a choice of them to be made.' Wordsworth reasserted the premise; but though he knew as well as Ben Jonson the necessity for the qualification he did not always act upon it; and so, as here, he is too often content to reproduce the people's words without discrimination of their poetic values. The story would lose nothing by being paraphrased in simple prose, for only in the last four lines does the moving power of the thought reside in the form of its expression.

chiming: because the voices of hounds vary from sharp to deep, and harmonize like a peal of bells.

mourning: that kindness should be so rare among men as to excite overwhelming gratitude.

220 *I have had playmates, I have had companions*

THIS poem, with its lack of rhyme and of an obvious pattern of regularly spaced stresses, has been used as an argument by those who hold that phrases lose part of their natural force by being adapted to verse form. But the essential element of that form, repetition, is markedly present here, not merely in the strong and frequent refrain, but in the repeated recurrence of phrases with a similar rhythm. If strokes are made for every stressed syllable and dots for every unstressed one the existence of a pattern will soon become obvious. Here also 'the words are the people's'; but the selection from among them is the poet's, and his selection produces a definite pattern without which we should have no pleasure in them.

221 *As slow our ship her foamy track*

'THE prettiness of a few songs preserves the memory of his name, but as a poet to *read* he is forgotten. There is nothing to read in him; no exquisite thought, no sublime feeling, no consummate description of true character.'

222 *There's not a joy the world can give like that it
takes away,*

THE lines were originally published as 'Stanzas for Music': those who play the banjo will easily improvise an air to suit them.

223 *There is a flower, the Lesser Celandine,*

WORDSWORTH'S interest in the celandine is the earliest indication in English poetry of a close and detailed observation of nature, inspired not by the sportsman's keenness, as Shakespeare sometimes is, nor by the mere love of beauty as he and all

poets habitually are, but by sympathy and tenderness and the recognition of kinship. The lesser celandine is the earliest flower to appear in profusion, and is therefore gathered in handfuls by untaught children attracted by its bright yellow. But it has not the glory of the buttercup-gold nor the drooping grace and fragrance of the cowslip; and so by the cursory observer it is passed by like the dandelion. Wordsworth was the first poet to observe it with sustained interest; and his poem illustrates both the closeness and accuracy of his study of it—his facts have the precision of science—and his belief that the meanest flower can give

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

LINES 5-12. The celandine protects its pollen by closing its petals on the approach of rain; but when its seeds are set its petals close no more, but whiten and wither.

21-4. In youth Nature lavishes her gifts; in age she grudges them to us. And youth squanders what age would fain recover.

224 *I remember, I remember*

IF this poem is sentimental, because the voice is the voice of ordinary men and the sentiments their ordinary sentiments, yet its sentimentality comes as near to poetry as ordinary men in their best and highest moments come near to poets.

226 *Rarely, rarely, comest thou,*

IN the work of a great poet we are constantly impressed with a sense of his absolute sureness of touch; it seems as if he *could* not go wrong, any more than the instinct of a bird could mislead it in building a nest. Although *Invocation* is not one of Shelley's greater poems, it contains a good illustra-

tion of this apparently unpremeditated felicity. The slight variation in the repetition in lines 4, 5 seems, on the face of it, only a device to get a rhyme; yet its effect is to add enormously to the impressiveness of the repetition.

Again in the fourth stanza we see this instinct at work, suiting the words to the action by the sudden change to feminine rhymes.

The fifth and sixth stanzas remind us that Shelley loved the elements as if they were living things with spirits to sympathize with his own.

227 *The sun is warm, the sky is clear,*

THE stanza is an elaborate and beautiful form, and perhaps gave Mr. Bridges the suggestion for the still lovelier one which he used in the greatest of all his lyrics, the *Elegy on a Young Lady*. Shelley, however, fails to take full advantage of its musical capacity: his one magic line is the thirtieth, in which the two spondees with their long vowels, *he down* and *tired child* give the sound a suggestion of utter weariness.

The simile in the thirteenth line gives a vivid image of the flashing spray.

228 *My days among the Dead are past ;*

‘My library was dukedom large enough.’

So Shakespeare makes Prospero say, but he himself to the end of his life would have said with Berowne,

Small have continual plodders ever won,
Save base authority from others’ books.

He knew, as Southey did not, that life cannot be fully lived in a library any more than in a sports-field or a shop. The slow, sad music of the poem suggests that Southey himself, with all his noble

gratitude to the dead, had a pathetic consciousness that books alone do not suffice for happiness. There is pathos too in the thought that of all his vast output of scholarly writing, only this short poem ensures that his name will not perish in the dust.

229 Souls of Poets dead and gone,

THE rather forced playfulness of the lines is poor compensation for the absence of Keats's magic and music. Cf. No. 167.

Mermaid Tavern: the haunt of Ben Jonson and his friends, including possibly Shakespeare.

LINE 22. This is his fun: there is no Mermaid among the twelve constellations of the Zodiac.

230 Proud Maisie is in the wood,

IN these few lines alone Scott proves that he shared the gift of the greater poets to suggest infinitely more than the mere words tell. The four short stanzas are charged with the mystery of brooding Fate like the pronouncement of an oracle, leaving the hearers in wonderment and awe.

231 One more Unfortunate

I WAS puzzled to account for my feeling that these moving verses were not really poetry until I remembered the distinction drawn by J. S. Mill between 'eloquence, which is *heard*, and poetry, which is *overheard*. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude. . . . Eloquence is feeling pouring itself out to other minds, courting their sympathy, or endeavouring to influence their belief or move them to passion or to action'. Certainly we feel that in this poem Hood is conscious of an audience, that his pathos is directly aimed at us; whereas the work of a greater poet

seems impersonal, in the sense that it was written primarily for the poet himself communing with his own soul.

Mill notes acutely that 'the French, who are the least poetical of all great and intellectual nations, are among the most eloquent'. He implies that they are the most easily moved by rhetoric. This perhaps explains why Byron is in France the best known of English poets.

232 O snatch'd away in beauty's bloom!

ITS freedom from self-consciousness makes this more simple and natural and so more convincing than many of Byron's lyrics.

LINE 7. The personification here is reminiscent of the previous century. The picture in itself is beautiful, but we forget the pathos in our interest in the image itself until reminded of it again in line 10.

unteach. a clumsy, unmelodious invention.

233 When maidens such as Hester die,

THE form and the music conveyed by it suggest the influence of Burns upon Lamb's ear.

I shall it call: the inversion is awkward.

235 We watch'd her breathing thro' the night,

TWO middle stanzas are quite unjustifiably omitted. Like these two they move and breathe with the quietness of watchers by a death-bed.

236 O listen, listen, ~~the~~ as gay!

THE suggestiveness of *Young Maisie*, in which Scott caught the spirit of the finer ballads, is far more impressive than these carefully elaborated picturesque details which leave no room for wonder.

237 *I saw where in the shroud did lurk*

THE verses reflect Lamb's love of the quaint conceits of the seventeenth-century writers which is so conspicuous in his essays. He would indeed have moved and charmed us more if he had written on this theme in prose, using these very phrases but giving them the matchless prose-rhythm that is more enchanting than all but the best verse.

238 *Where art thou, my beloved Son,*

THIS is one of Wordsworth's most characteristic poems; it contains passages of simple crudity such as only he would, and others of supreme beauty such as only he could, have written; ordinary undistinguished phrases, and extraordinary ones, some merely uncouth and some invested with magical enchantment.

In the first two stanzas the mother speaks, or Wordsworth for her, according to his theory that poetry should be 'a selection of the language really spoken by men, with metre super-added'. But in the next two lines she speaks a language that is artificial without being poetical, which may be said also of line 19. The three next stanzas are full of artless pathos, and then suddenly the great poet begins to speak, and for four stanzas, in the second of which he reaches his full power, we are held spellbound like Desdemona listening to the deep music of romantic experience.

Mr. F. W. H. Myers has noted the musical effect of the alliteration, in lines 50-6, of *m* and *d*, particularly, which give depth of tone. But even more significant is the art by which words of Latin origin are contrasted with Saxon monosyllables: the last two lines, for example, reveal the characteristic genius of our mixed language as well as any in English poetry by their effect of simplicity, strength,

and majesty, of lucidity and mystery—for though the meaning of ‘an incommunicable sleep’ is perfectly clear, yet the phrase suggests the ever-haunting mystery of what lies beyond the grave, ‘and in that sleep of death what dreams may come’. So ‘summoned’ invokes some inscrutable power whose presence, by means of the single word, is felt to brood over the whole stanza.

240 *Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!*

241 *Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!*

BEFORE a word has been read, the very shape of their printed forms suggests the contrast between the two poems. Wordsworth’s is long and level like the ground on which the lark’s nest is made; Shelley’s is light and unsubstantial as the air in which it sings. And Wordsworth’s music is the grave voice of the thinker, Shelley’s the ecstatic song of the lark itself, with its short bursts of melody rising to a long-sustained climax. So to the one poet the bird is a minstrel singing of human love, a pilgrim returning to his home; to the other it is a spirit, prophesying in an unknown tongue of a joy beyond human comprehension. But that is the joy to which humanity aspires, of which love is the shadow it clutches, and of which it is fain to hear; and so while it quotes approvingly the last couplet of Wordsworth, it is Shelley’s song that haunts its dreams. Yet not the lovely images of the earlier stanzas; they make our waking moments in this world more lovely; it is the later stanzas that make us dream of a joy this world cannot give. The long elaborated similes with which the poem opens have been criticized because they do not make the bird clearer to us but distract our thoughts from it to dwell on their own beauty. But that is their very purpose: they fulfil Johnson’s second

function of a simile, to ennoble its object. Henceforward the little brown bird will recall to Shelley's readers a series of lovely visions whenever its song is heard. And thus one great end of poetry is achieved, 'to make this much loved earth more lovely', by filling it with beautiful associations.

LINE 14, No. 240. Cf. No. 241 lines 36, 37. Wordsworth's is the material light that hides the lark from our dazzled eyes. Shelley's is the light by which men see the world as the poet sees it while he himself 'walks the earth unguessed at'.

LINE 70, No. 241. The function of poetry is at once to increase our consciousness of 'hidden want' and to satisfy it with beauty. Cf. lines 86-90 and No. 203, lines 13-16.

242 *Beneath these fruit-tree boughs that shed*

243 *O blithe new-comer ! I have heard,*

THE contrast between Shelley's lark and Wordsworth's is happily repeated in the comparison between two birds of his own. The greenfinch is a real bird in the real world, a beautiful material thing; but the cuckoo is a voice from the vanished world of youthful dreams, that for an enchanted moment re-transfigures this one, investing it with 'the light that never was on sea or land' but only in the vision of the child and the poet. Cf. No. 287, lines 1-18, 51-76.

244 *My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains*

AFTER the cuckoo, the nightingale; this is the obvious association between the two poems. The real one is to be found in Wordsworth's last stanza, which stands like a text above Keats's Ode and is indeed its theme. Poetry was for Keats the creation by imaginative power of a world of sensuous

beauty in which every physical sense is at once quickened and gratified, not the real world transfigured as Wordsworth saw it, but a world seen in a trance by a dreamer held spellbound and incapable of action. For Keats, unlike the greatest poets, had no hope of this world and sought in poetry merely an escape from it. So he finds in the nightingale's music the hypnotic effect of a drug, under the influence of which he loses consciousness of his surroundings and awakes in a dreamland of drowsy delight from which rather than return he would prefer to sink into nothingness through the continued action of the drug. And yet, after all, the supreme beauty of his poem is not the glamorous world of his trance but his waking vision of the real nightingale and the real men and women who had loved it before him. Magical as the other stanzas are they fade into unreality before the imaginative truth of the penultimate stanza whose music they merely echo.

The stanza-form itself is a beautiful invention with its intricate rhyme-plan ever repeating yet ever varying its chimes so that the ear is kept ever expectant and always delighted, its long lines with their sustained melody, and its one short one coming just at the moment when variety is needed to prevent continued delight passing into monotony.

LINE 3. *drains*: dregs.

7. *That*: i.e. the thought that.

16. *Hippocrene*: the spring on Mount Olympus that gushed out of the earth when struck by the hoof of Pegasus. Keats imagines it would have the effect of wine.

18. *mouth*: i.e. of the beaker.

23-30. Cf. 314, lines 37-42. So to see the world is the price the poet must pay for his lovelier visions of it.

23. Weariness without rest, action without the peace of achievement—never was the curse of worldliness so analysed and expressed; in three words.

24. The call upon the breath made by the aspirates gives the line the effect of sighs ending in a groan.

25. The monosyllabic epithets fall on the ear like a knell.

28. The heavy *d*'s of *leaden-eyed* make the sound as expressive as the image.

32. *Bacchus and his pards*: the god of wine, who was pictured with tigers or leopards attending him.

33. *viewless*: invisible; Keats will intoxicate himself with poetry instead of wine.

40. The rhythm is as sinuous in its movement as the ways.

42. *incense*: fragrance. By the epithet *soft* the sense of touch is also engaged.

43. *embalmed*: spiced.

50. The sense of hearing is here involved. Only the noblest sense, of sight, is dim in this dream-stanza.

55. *rich*: a notable use of the word; he means that to die will satisfy every wish.

61. The change of tone here is remarkable; it is as if a man murmuring in his sleep suddenly spoke with the strength and decision of his waking voice.

The marvellous music of the stanza defies analysis; but its subtle alliteration will repay careful study.

62. *hungry*: such a use of the word admirably illustrated a poet's visionary power to see the eager generations pressing on one another, hungry for existence and hurried off life's stage to make room for new-comers.

66. The poet's intuition told him that, though Ruth left her home to follow her mother-in-law,

one so lovable must have looked back with love and longing.

69, 70. The essence of all romance is concentrated in the epithets of these lines; when we say that poetry is an incantation it is of such as these that we are thinking. The master-magic is in the word *forlorn*, which means lost, and suggests the dim memories of which we have at moments a vague consciousness, as of an infinite past, of times when we looked out not from sashed windows but from casements, when life was a more adventurous and a more exciting thing. And then all that is lost, and we are conscious only of that single self which is our present humdrum existence. (Note to No. 250.)

80. *do I wake or sleep?* : i.e. is life real or a dream? Only death can answer.

245 Earth has not anything to show more fair:

'YOUR old men shall dream dreams; your young men shall see visions.' Keats, as in the last poem, is the dreamer; Wordsworth, here as always, the visionary. He sees what all may see, but he sees it transfigured. His is the higher gift to us, for it is better that we should learn to see the beautiful aspects of the world we have to live in than to escape from it into a world of illusion. The things which Wordsworth transfigures for us become more real and more permanent than reality; when the real London is covered up in weeds, like Troy, Wordsworth's city will remain to preserve it as a beautiful memory and, which is better, to make other cities lovelier by teaching men how to look at them, by associating his poem with what they see.

LINE 1. The quiet assuredness of this opening line is far more impressive than any exclamatory rhapsody.

4, 5. It is a better thing to stimulate our imaginations to create the vision of freshness, light, glow, and colour suggested in the lines than to attempt to paint them for us.

7. The open country south of London was then within sight.

12-14. Note the effect of the alliteration of the quiet *l*'s and *s*'s, yet the sense of subdued power in the last line, due perhaps to the open vowels and the single aspirate.

246 *I met a traveller from an antique land*

AN impressive poem but an imperfect sonnet, though the dying fall of its conclusion makes it end like an excellent one. Shelley had seldom the patience and the artistic conscience to work upon a poem until its form reached perfection.

LINES 5-8. The passions stamped upon the face survive the sculptor who with silent irony carved them, and the proud heart that indulged them; i.e. the sculptor's scorn of scorn has outlived him and his master.

247 *Degenerate Douglas ! O the unworthy lord !*

248 *Yes, there is holy pleasure in thine eye !*

THE first sonnet is a reproach to landlords who abuse their right of possession by spoiling the natural beauty of their land; the second is a protest against the purchase by strangers of country cottages to make themselves week-end homes in villages to which they do not belong and which are spoilt by their presence. It is to be regretted that neither poem is one of those supreme achievements of Wordsworth which have become part of the national consciousness.

horde: the need for a rhyme seems the only explanation of the use of the word.

beggar'd and outrag'd: two very impressive epithets; but the rhythm of the following sentence is by contrast weak and ineffective.

Lines 2-4, No. 248. The description tempts to the very crime he is deploring.

own sky: the cottage being in a cup in the hills.

249 *Sweet Highland Girl, a very shower*

250 *Behold her, single in the field,*

THE subject of both poems is the same. Wordsworth's enthusiasm for it is equally obvious in both, and so is his wish to immortalize by a beautiful creation the beauty he has seen. And yet it is only of the second poem that we can say: all lovers of poetry know it, and by none who have once heard it can it be forgotten. It possesses in a far higher degree than the first the great poetical quality of memorableness, which is due partly to its superiority of form, its stanza being a far lovelier thing than the couplet of the first, and partly to the magical quality of its phrasing. The carefully selected words of the first have come by taking thought: but it seems to us that mere thinking could never have discovered such enchantments as haunt the music of 'old, unhappy far-off things' or 'breaking the silence of the seas'. We feel the presence of something in the words that is much more than their meaning: they remind us of much more than they say.

consenting: conspiring to achieve a single purpose, like the natural influences mentioned in the lines that follow. Cf. No. 179.

LINES 42-46, No. 249. She struggled good naturedly with the difficulties of conversation in an alien tongue.

a wave: a symbol of the evanescent.

62-78. Cf. No. 250, lines 31, 32 and No. 253, lines 17-24.

5-8, No. 250. Hidden alliteration helps to account for the wonderful music of these lines.

9-20. These and particularly the last two are among the most memorable and characteristic of the imperishable lines that the Romantic Revival gave to English literature. They are full of the suggestiveness of 'a devotion to something afar from the sphere of our sorrow'. The secret of their power may lie in the theory that no part of our experience is really forgotten but remains hidden in our subconsciousness; it is even held by some that the experience of our ancestors is dormant in us too. Words rhythmically musical may have the power to stir the subconscious memories that correspond to them and so to give us a sense not of their present limited meaning but of an infinite past.

251 *At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,*

IF its subject-matter alone made a poem great this should be one of the noblest, for its theme is that of No. 243, combined with that of No. 245, two of Wordsworth's greatest poems. Yet no one thinking of a vision suggested by a bird's song would recall inevitably the Wood Street thrush; and no one thinking of a transfigured London would instantly remember Poor Susan's vision though it ought to have been even more impressive than the view from Westminster. The explanation is that Wordsworth's musical instinct has here failed him; we see his picture but his rhythm does not compel us to view it with the appropriate emotions. The image in,

The river glideth at his own sweet will

is really less impressive than that in

And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside;
yet the line moves us vastly more and seems to
mean more though it actually says less. You cannot
dream on a cantering Pegasus; you want to
sing 'Of a certain old woman who lived in a shoe'.

252 *Ariel to Miranda:—Take*

THE Lady is Shelley's friend Mrs. Jane Williams;
he imagines her as Miranda, her husband as Ferdinand,
and himself as Ariel, who having fulfilled the last
order of Prospero to bring the lovers safely to Naples,
still watches over them in successive reincarnations.

mighty verses: of *The Tempest*.

interlunar swoon: the period when the moon is
invisible.

in a body. i.e. Shelley's; cf. *The Tempest* ii.

this idol: the guitar; because inhabited by the
spirit of music of line 81. The guitar is now in the
Bodleian Gallery.

mysterious sound: the music of the spheres.

friend: Shelley's MS. has *Jane*.

253 *I wandered lonely as a cloud*

ILLUSTRATES once more Sir Philip Sidney's saying
that poetry makes the loved things of earth more
lovely by touching them with a beauty that is not
of earth. Those who have once seen daffodils through
a poet's eye see them always thereafter in a more
loving and appreciative way; the beauty of poetry
has been added to their own.

In the first stanza the contrast between the
stately movement of the opening lines with their
slow vowels and the lightness of the last line with

its short ones is exquisitely appropriate to the images. Cf. line 12.

The simile by which we are made to see the stars above and below reminds us of Wordsworth's beautiful image of the swan upon St. Mary's Lake, 'floating double, swan and shadow'. (No. 257, l. 44.)

LINES 17, 18. The long vowels slow the music to suit the more reflective mood of the thought.

21, 22. The lines were suggested by his wife, but the thought was ever present with Wordsworth, who believed that by constant communion with Nature the mind would become 'A mansion for all lovely thought, the memory be as a dwelling-place for all sweet sounds and harmonies'.

254 *With little here to do or see*

RUSKIN used this poem to illustrate the difference between *fancy* playing with a flower, 'calling it soft names in many a musèd rhyme', a nun, a queen, a Cyclops, a shield, a star,—the intellect conscious all the time that it is essentially none of these things,—and *imagination* suddenly revealing the deep truth of its being and of our own, that 'ye are all members one of another'. I like to think that this last stanza of Wordsworth's poem may have inspired one of the loveliest of Mr. Kipling's 'A Charm'.

255 *Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,*

SHAKESPEARE'S 'Teeming Autumn, big with rich increase' is the inspiration of the poem, and the word 'rich', a favourite with Keats, describes both its imagery and its music; only its deep-toned melody reminds us of the sadness of autumn, that comes from 'looking on the happy autumn fields and thinking of the days that are no more'.

That melody has a marvellous stanza to meander in; the opening quatrain with its conventional alternating rhymes, conventional only because successive generations have approved them, is followed by seven lines whose rhymes seem to exist to illustrate what Milton meant by 'linked sweetness, long drawn out'. No poem better illustrates the exquisite effects of alliteration: in the first stanza *m* is the key-note, in the second *s*, with *l*, *b*, and *f* as the under-tones in both; in the third all five are woven into the music. And yet so innocently is it done that the critic seeking to surprise its secret is made to feel like 'one who would peep and botanize upon his mother's grave'. Too many 'run on' lines tend to make the reader overrun the rhymes and lose the sense of form: too many closed lines also spoil the form by breaking the sense of unity in the stanza. Proportion here is exquisitely kept in all three. There is nowhere in the poem the magic of some lines in the more subjective odes; yet, as a whole, it is more perfect, as autumn itself is more perfect than spring, and maturity than youth, though they are less rapturous. So there is less variety in the tone of the melody with its long uniform lines. How perfectly that melody is adapted to the mood, not merely in general tone but in detail, is seen in the lines on the music of Autumn, where the verbs *sing*, *whistle*, *twitter* have all the thin subdued sound of the weakest of the vowels.

256 *When first the fiery-mantled Sun*

HERE the characteristic voice of the eighteenth century is heard for the last time. Cf. No. 117.

Calpe: the ancient name of Gibraltar.

Queen of vintage: autumn.

Lofoden: Norwegian islands near the Maelstrom,

whirlpool once supposed to suck down whales and ships.

INES 25-32. Winter comes southward with forms until driven back by the sun.

57 *From Stirling Castle we had seen*

58 *And is this—Yarrow?—This the Stream*

LORDSWORTH had not the gift which Macaulay shared with Milton of making a list of place-names sound like an incantation; neither had he Mr. Tipling's feeling for historic sites which makes *Wick's Song* an enchanted guide-book to the Isle of Gramarye. In these two poems he has given us some charming pictures of still life; but his music, with its swift, easy movement, excites an appetite for action which is never gratified; and so our appreciation of what he has given us is dulled. Before the end of either poem is reached we are tired of its unvarying jog-trot—unless our sense of duty is more highly developed than our ear for rhythm.

In lines 65-72 of No. 258 there is something ludicrous, as of elephantine gambollings.

59 *Best and brightest, come away,*

THE obvious comparison is with *L'Allegro*; but Shelley walks the landscape like one of ourselves, to whom natural objects have a life of their own and are not as they were to Milton merely symbols of Greek mythology. The moon, for example, to Shelley, was for the time a person; to Milton she was always a dead planet that suggested to his memory the myth of Cynthia.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing in the poem is the growing power alike of its imagery and its music, so that its last lines are by far the most impressive.

261 *It is a beauteous evening, calm and free ;*

THE music is perfect, alike in its own melody and in its perfect adaptation to its theme. The alliteration of *s* and *l* throughout keep its tone subdued except for one deep-toned moment when the voice of the sea sounds in the heavy *nd*'s of the eighth line, dying away again in *everlastingly*. The simile by which the quiet of the evening is made visible to us is so impressive that the voice pauses on it and so gives us time to dwell upon it. The momentary passion at the opening of the sestet gives the touch which no perfect sonnet should be without; and the associations suggested by Abraham's bosom and the Holy of Holies leave us thinking, as a great sonnet ought to do, 'that strain I heard was of a higher mood'.

262 *Star that bringest home the bee,*

THE first stanza is lovely with its exquisite selection of details and its quiet music, hushed by *s*'s, appropriate to them. The simile, too, in the last two lines, is perfect in its suggestiveness. But in the next two stanzas inspiration fails. There is an incongruous abruptness in the opening of line 7, *herds* clashes harshly with *heard* in line 9, yellow smoke would be ugly if it were true, but as cottagers burn wood the smoke would have been blue. And in the last stanza the tenderness of the thought finds no adequate correspondence in the melody of the words.

263 *The sun upon the lake is low,*

SEE note to Nos. 7, 8.

264 *Art thou pale for weariness*

CF. No. 78. Jonson is playing with a myth, but Shelley sees in the moon himself and all lonely spirits that are different from their kind.

LINE 4. The stars are suns, the moon an exiled portion of the earth, flung off from it before it was completely solidified.

265 *A widow bird sate mourning for her love*

PERFECT beauty in small proportions. Every detail is carefully selected to produce a cumulative effect of desolation, and the slow, sad music moves like the freezing stream.

268 *I dream'd that as I wander'd by the way*

THIS is a day-dream as the Nightingale Ode is of the night. Here we *can* 'see what flowers are at our feet', for the appeal of the images is almost entirely to sight. Some of the flowers we can recognize, but others are such 'as only poets know, and only know the country where they grow'. The music has not the intoxicating quality of Keats; it sharpens our vision instead of drugging it; the alternating rhymes, repeating again and again, keep the mind ever on the alert expecting their recurrence, and the final couplet, like that of a Shakespearian sonnet, has something of the arresting and stimulating effect of an epigram. Dreaming through Keats's more intricate stanza we do not notice that the rhyme-pattern changes, but this simpler yet beautiful rhyme-plan never allows us to forget the form.

Arcturi: plural of Arcturus, the brightest star of the summer sky.

constellated: arranged in star-groups, like the constellations; as daisies bloom throughout the year they are like those constellations of the circum-polar stars which never set but are visible every night and all night.

LINE 14. Shelley omitted this line, and by a right instinct, for its rhythm is not fine and the

simile is somewhat forced; moreover, the human image here is distracting and out of place; and it holds up the progress of the stanza. *Its mother is the earth.*

21. The versifier would have made his line smooth by inversion, writing *roses wild* to accommodate the words to the verse-rhythm; Shelley imposes the natural rhythm upon it, and makes a line of which Palgrave truly said 'our language has no line modulated with more subtle sweetness'.

prank't: curiously decked.

28. Water-lilies bloom in July, anemones in March, bluebells in May, roses in June; only in dreams could they be seen together.

36-7. The inversion spoils the stanza; the flowers imprisoned in his hand kept the arrangement in which they grew side by side. But even in a dream that would not have been possible.

269 *Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes*

THOUGH printed as a sonnet the poem has neither the nature nor the true form of one. The sonnet does not lend itself to a purely reflective theme and a meditative mood. The thought here is that of Wordsworth's definition of poetry, 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', and of its object, 'truth carried alive into the heart by passion'. As we learn from *Daffodils* and the *Highland Girl*, his memory brooded over its visions of things he had seen and loved; and of his loving memories his poetry was born.

270 *Ever let the Fancy roam!*

THOUGH the voice is the voice of Milton in *L'Allegro*, the thought is that of the preceding poem—that 'the Mind's internal heaven' has joys greater

than those of the external world. Yet 'there is nothing in the understanding that was not before in the senses'; all these things upon which Fancy delights to dwell must first be seen and loved as realities. And so the poem itself can only be fully appreciated by those who themselves have known and loved the hyacinth and the freckled eggs and heard the acorns pattering down on the dry leaves. Poetry makes these things more lovely, but it cannot supply their place.

LINE 2. The suggestion seems to be that things visibly present give no pleasure; but then neither could their memories give delight, which contradicts the rest of the poem.

red-lipped: the epithet is bewilderingly transferred from Autumn to her fruits.

20, 21. Only direct observation could have enabled Fancy to imagine this.

29-37. These are the true functions of Fancy.

shaded: because growing in woods. The description in this couplet is perfect.

freckled eggs: the blackbird's.

67-76. Keats is here with the lesser poets; cf. No. 183.

Ceres' daughter: Persephone, carried off by Pluto, lord of the Underworld.

Hebe: cup-bearer to the gods.

271 *Life of Life! thy lips enkindle*

OF this lyric Mr. J. A. Symonds writes: 'Shelley scorned the aesthetics of a school which finds "sense swooning into nonsense" admirable. And if a critic is so dull as to ask what "Life of Life! thy lips enkindle" means, or to whom it is addressed, none can help him any more than one can help a man whose sense of hearing is too gross for the tenuity

of a bat's cry.' Certainly a poem may be unintelligible and yet infinitely suggestive by the power of its music or its images, as Mr. Symonds and others have found this one. But for most people this suggestiveness depends almost entirely upon the music; and I must confess to an ear too gross to catch a divine harmony in these stanzas.

272 *I heard a thousand blended notes*

MEN do with Wordsworth's poetry as they do with the Christian Gospel, accept parts and ignore parts; few men have remained poor because they believe that it is hard for the rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven; and few who profess and call themselves Wordsworthians take this poem seriously. It contradicts what they know of science, of the struggle for existence, of 'Nature red in tooth and claw'; it has no authority from religion, not even from those older religions which saw God in clouds and heard Him in the wind or which saw Nature as His vesture. For this 'faith' of Wordsworth is neither pagan nor pantheistic. Nature, for him, exists apart from God, as he himself does, and has a spiritual existence distinct from God's. And as he believes, as a Christian, that his spirit can commune with God, so he believes, as a poet, that it can commune with Nature. We may refuse to accept the faith of this poem; but if we refuse to accept Wordsworth's assertion that this *is* his faith we understand nothing of the man or his poetry. For this is the very gospel which Wordsworth came into the world to proclaim. It is, after all, less difficult to reconcile with 'the struggle for existence' than the Sermon on the Mount.

The verses also illustrate, and prove, that other faith of Wordsworth's, that poetry can be made by a selection from the phrases of ordinary speech

metrically arranged; for this poem is successful in pleasing both ear and eye, and, in Dryden's phrase, 'instructs as it delights'. But it illustrates too the limitations of Wordsworth's theory, for, in spite of its intrinsic interest, we prize it not mainly for its own merits, but because it is the creed of one who spoke not merely the speech of men but the language of the immortals. But the rhythms of that tongue are not represented in it.

273 *When Ruth was left half desolate*

THE most important lines in these otherwise uninspired verses are those which prove beyond all doubt that Wordsworth's theory of an indwelling spirit in Nature was not pantheism; it might inspire evil as well as good (lines 121-38). The rest, except a fine picture or two, e.g. in lines 61-72, illustrates Wordsworth's frequent failure to distinguish between the functions of verse and prose. 'Poetry, because it has a more marked rhythm than prose, must be more intense in meaning and more concise in style than prose. People expect a "marked rhythm" to imply something worth marking; if it fails to do so they are disappointed. They are displeased at the visible waste of a powerful instrument, for the metrical expression of full thought and eager feeling—the burst of metre—incident to high imagination, should not be wasted on petty matters which prose does as well—which it does better—which it suits by its very lumpiness and weakness, whose small changes it follows more easily, and to whose lowest details it can fully and without effort degrade itself. Verse, too, should be more concise, for long-continued rhythm tends to jade the mind, just as brief rhythm tends to attract the attention. Poetry should be memorable and emphatic, intense, and *soon over*.'

Bagehot wrote this in an essay on 'Tennyson and Browning', but he could have found his best illustrations in Wordsworth, in line 115, for example, or lines 187-92.

The simile in lines 40-2 degrades rather than ennobles the vision of a graceful and sportive youth. Cf. the lovely simile in lines 69-72, and the blunder of comparing material with spiritual things in lines 89-90.

274 Many a green isle needs must be

ONCE more we have the short couplets of *L'Allegro*, but the poet's power to vary them and still more to change their music with the change of thought is lacking; so that in spite of the pictures shown us we are wearied long before the end, though Palgrave has omitted thirty-nine lines after line 26, and a hundred and forty-three after line 102. How greatly its music influences our attitude towards a poem may be understood if the first section of this one is read aloud and then Matthew Arnold's lines on the same subject, No. 366, lines 51-73, or if the description of Venice is followed by the reading of Wordsworth's sonnet No. 211. Then we shall understand that dark saying of Tennyson's: 'It does not matter what we say; but it matters everything *how we say it*'.

*275 O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's
being,*

If impressiveness is the final test of art, this is the greatest of Shelley's lyrics. A great force sweeps through it from the first line to the last, felt in the movement of the verse, heard in its predominating dentals and gutturals and rolling *r*'s and bursting labials, seen in its images of things driven and

shaken and torn. In most of the stanzas there is not a single full stop to check the onrush of the verse until the end is reached; and even there the note of exclamation denotes not so much a breathing-space as the expiration of breath. Though the stanzas are in no other sense 'sonnets' they have the fourteen lines which experience seems to have found to be the limit to which a passionate outburst can be maintained without pause. In its kinetic energy the poem is characteristic of Shelley's poetry, and offers a striking contrast with the static visions of Keats and the restrained power of Wordsworth. It is characteristic too in its revelation of Shelley's attitude towards Nature. He did not believe with Wordsworth that the contemplation of Nature's works 'in a wise passiveness' would strengthen and inform the soul; he was, indeed, attracted not so much by Nature's works as by her forces; for him the wind is alive, the woods are but the instrument on which it plays. In this he is much nearer to the primitive mind than to Wordsworth.

LINE 1. The alliteration of *w* and *b* makes demands upon the breath which are highly suggestive of the force in the poem.

2, 3. This most impressive simile not only fulfils the elementary purpose of making the thought clear but also the higher one of making it infinitely suggestive.

4. The colours are selected, not invented; elm, briony, lime, and virginia creeper, for example, have respectively these autumn colours; and they are selected because they, and not the commoner russet and orange, suggest the hues of disease.

11. The animal life in the simile powerfully suggests the movement and energy in the expanding buds of spring.

14. *Destroyer*: cf. lines 2-5. *Preserver*: cf. lines 6-12.

15-28. The images are less defined, because they are of the air, not of the earth; but, appropriately, the wind actually increases in force here, heavy *d*'s being introduced as if for the purpose, and culminates in gale fury in the last line.

17. Cf. Shakespeare's picture of the waves rising to mingle with the clouds.

18. *angels*: literally messengers.

21. *Maenads*: frenzied women.

29-36. There is a momentary lull in the force of the wind, for the picture is of summer calm. The alliteration of *l* introduces a magical change into the melody as the smooth-gliding dactyls of line 31 change its movement.

34. This is not imagination but observation, exactly rendered, of the appearance of things seen below the surface of smooth, sunlit water. With *intensifier day* cf. 'light thickens' of Macbeth.

36-42. The suddenly rising force is suggested in the alliteration of *p*, and still more in the gutturals of *cleave* and *chasms*; it dies down into a distant rumble, subdued by the *s*'s of the remaining lines. The personified sea-plants, 'grey with fear', have the impressive effect of Keats's 'death-pale were they all' in a similar twilight world.

276 *I was thy neighbour once, thou rugged Pile!*

THE contrast here is between Wordsworth and Keats; indeed, the poem might have been written to refute the doctrine that 'beauty is truth', and that 'the world of dreams is better far than this world of unbelief and fear'. Unfortunately for his argument, the most memorable words in the poem are always and by every one quoted as an almost inspired expression of a view of art exactly the opposite of that which Wordsworth is here taking.

Every one has heard that the supreme function of the artist is to add to reality

the gleam,
The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream;

but very few know the poem in which the words are found, and few even of those remember that they do not represent Wordsworth's opinion. This is surely one of the strangest ironies in literary history. It is to be noted that Wordsworth proposes no alternative theory of art: the poem is concerned mainly with a philosophy of *life*; and art appears to have no place in it.

rugged Pile: not the castle of Peel in the Isle of Man, but a ruined peel-tower on an island near Barrow-in-Furness.

LINES 29-40. Wordsworth's brother John, captain of an East Indiaman, had been lost at sea. He forgets that the sea in anger of line 40 is as much a creation of poetic imagination as the smiling sea of line 19.

46. *I love to see*: i.e. in spite of his theory, he is taking an impassioned view of it, and seeing it not as it really was but invested by poetic imagination with the human qualities of fortitude and strength. Only in a 'poet's dream' could the reality implied in the epithet *trampling* be revealed. Here *is* a light upon the sea; and we know that we have not really seen the waves before.

the Kind: human-kind.

277 *On a Poet's lips I slept*

SHELLEY, whose theories both of life and poetry agreed better with his practice than Wordsworth's, here accepts and reasserts the faith discarded in the last poem: he knows that Wordsworth was right when he thought he was wrong, and right too,

though without knowing it, when he commended his friend's picture for its reality; for it is only by the light of art that reality can be truly revealed.

278 *The world is too much with us; late and soon,*
'WHAT shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

Wordsworth is here engaged in the poet's true business, which is not to argue about the function of art but to reveal it so that argument becomes superfluous. There is no arguing with the assertions in this poem: stupid men may ignore, and soulless men may cheerfully accept, but no argument can refute them.

The third line has sometimes been taken to mean that those who own the land know little of its true delights; but Wordsworth means that all of us fail to get joy from Nature because we see her from a wrong point of view, as the provider of material necessities. To enjoy her and our own lives we must see her as Shelley saw her in the last poem and Wordsworth and the primitive Greeks saw her in this one. Then we shall realize that a man's happiness depends not upon the things he possesses but upon those which possess him.

a sordid boon: a notable use of oxymoron—a device powerful to arrest attention, and a favourite with Wordsworth.

LINES 5, 6. A wonderful contrast in sound, partly effected by means of the free vowels in the one line and the excess of consonants in the other.

A Pagan: because early man saw spiritual beings everywhere in Nature.

279 *Tax not the royal Saint with vain expense,*
THE nearest to Milton of all Wordsworth's sonnets. Like most of Milton's it is more informed by thought than by passion—the greatest sonnets

have both elements in an equal degree; it is a single paragraph without a climax or any obvious central pause; it reaches its highest level of inspiration when music is mentioned; and its diction is at once melodious and dignified: there is no pretence that everyday speech is adequate to express the feeling of those who find themselves in the presence of one of the noblest works of man.

The thought in the last two lines is highly significant: it is what might have been expected not from Wordsworth but from Keats, and is indeed an argument for his belief that 'a thing of beauty is a joy for ever'.

royal Saint: Henry VI, founder of King's College.

ill-matched aims. the size of the building bears no proportion to the numbers of those for whose use it was built.

white-robed scholars: the fellows and scholars, for whom the college was originally founded, are distinguished from the ordinary undergraduate members by surplices.

the sense: sense of beauty.

self-poised: the parts of a fan-tracery vault are balanced one against the other.

LINE 12. No poet ever wrote a line with a rhythm more suggestive of the thing spoken of. It is the very echo of music heard in a vaulted choir. The hollow echoing effect of the repeated *n*'s is involved in its secret.

280 *Verse, a breeze 'mid blossoms straying,*

THOSE who are young will find little to interest them here; and those whose youth is gone will think Coleridge's lamentation inadequate to express their own. To them the most moving lines will be the couplet

Nought cared this body for wind or weather
When Youth and I lived in't together.

The simile in lines 12-15 refers to the newly invented steamers, but it is not a happy one, for a steamer, especially one of the early paddle-wheel type, is the very antithesis of a skiff. The simile in the last lines, too, though its image is striking and pathetic, is not very clearly related to life. The truth is, unfortunately, that *we* are the guests; and that Life stands upon no ceremony in dismissing us. Coleridge has wasted what might have been a very impressive figure.

281 *We walk'd along, while bright and red*

282 *We talk'd with open heart, and tongue*

'TRUTH narrative and past', wrote Davenant to Hobbes, 'is the idol of historians (who worship a dead thing), and truth operative, and by effects continually alive, is the mistress of poets'. The second kind of truth is the characteristic gift of the poet; Wordsworth gives us an example in the penultimate stanza of No. 281, when, speaking for all fathers in all ages, he reveals the love that prefers a memory to a new possession, and another in lines 35 and 36 of No. 282, in which the eternal regret for what might have been makes its universal appeal. Some preparation and setting for these truths was needed; but the 'narrative truth' with its temporary and limited interest is here out of due proportion. These two walks are not, like those taken 'near the sea' or 'by Ullswater', 'nurslings of immortality'; having read them, with whatever interest in the scenes shown us, we forget every word but the stanza or two in which 'truth continually operative' is enshrined in beauty.

283 *The more we live, more brief appear*

THIS, too, expresses a universal experience of the middle-aged, though youth is ignorant of it and

age has mercifully forgotten it. But the expression is far more impressive in its images than in its musical suggestion: the rapid movement of the verse corresponds with the image of the swiftly flowing river; but a greater poet would have made it slow and reluctant, in *contrast* with the river and in more profound correspondence with the mood of those who feel the force of the current. Cf. Mr. Hardy's *The Superseded*, in which the rhythm is as slow-footed and heavy of movement as Age itself.

284 *Four Seasons fill the measure of the year;*

OF all Keats's sonnets the most directly imitative of Shakespeare, and therefore the one that most suffers by the contrast. The music and the thought alike are echoes of 'The Seven Ages of Man' in *As You Like It*. But that is not Shakespeare's lyrical music; that is not the voice that speaks in the sonnets; it is mere narrative blank verse beside the golden notes and the superb passion of the greater sonnets. And so in musical power this is one of the least successful of Keats's work in sonnet-form. Only the last couplet might have come from one of Shakespeare's. In substance too it suffers by the challenge. Shakespeare never forgot, as Keats does, that life is made for action as well as for thought and dreams.

ngh: a verb meaning approach; of no golden coinage.

285 *O World! O Life! O Time!*

286 *My heart leaps up when I behold*

287 *There was a time when meadow, grove, and
stream,*

AT first sight there is something almost ludicrous in thus linking two brief little songs with Words-

worth's highest achievement. Yet the first fragment is in a sense the text of the great Ode; and the second is its epilogue.

Coleridge said of the Ode that 'the poet might have prefixed the lines which Dante addresses to one of his own Canzoni—

Canzon io credo, che saranno radi
Che tua ragione intendan bene,
Tanto lor sei faticoso ed alto.

O lyric song; there will be few, think I,
Who may thy import understand aright:
Thou art for *them*, so arduous and so high!'

But he goes on to show that he himself, when he wrote his commentary on the Ode, had lost some of the finer intuitions that are needed for a full appreciation of it. He objects that 'children give us no such information of themselves'; the answer is, that though we do not know in childhood what we have, we do know in manhood what we have lost; and both the story of the fall of man, and the belief that to enter the kingdom of Heaven men must become as children again, testify to the universality of that knowledge. The seventeenth century knew it, as Vaughan's poem, No. 75, reminds us; the eighteenth century forgot it; and the Romantic Revival of the nineteenth is above all things the revival of our consciousness that reality is veiled mystery, and the material world an aspect of something that would be entirely different if we could change our view of it. This, and not any Platonic theory of pre-existence, is the inspiration of Wordsworth's Ode. He believes that children, being nearer to God, see an aspect of created things more truthful than ours because more near to that of their Creator, who, when He had made them, looked at His work and saw that it was good. The adult gradually dulls himself, or is dulled, into the

belief that his aspect of things is reality, though he is sometimes disturbed by a momentary consciousness that his reality is about to vanish and be transformed. The only satisfying theory of art is Shelley's, that it is the means by which this consciousness is stirred and strengthened and kept alive in men.

But it is not its philosophy that has kept this poem alive in the hearts of men for a century and will continue to preserve it for centuries to come. It is its beauty, which makes its appeal to young and old alike, whether or not they are capable of understanding its full significance; it is the spell of the magic rhythm and the charm of the enchanted vision; it is the melody that haunts the ear, and the picture that stamps itself indelibly on the imagination in such lines as

The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare ;

and

The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep,—
and

Hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

When we call these lines immortal it is because we feel intuitively that they do for us in this life what immortality itself will do for us in another—transfigure and make significant for us the world of sense, and certify us of the reality that lies behind it.

LINES 1-18. He states the universal experience that the glamour of earth fades as we grow older.

19-50. He sees that all Nature is glad, and tries to see it as once he did and as the shepherd boy still does.

51-7. 'Alas, the Fancy cannot cheat so well'; the gleam will not return.

58-76. Children come from the spirit-world, and have powers of spiritual vision which they gradually lose.

77-107. The child busies himself in worldly things in imitation of his elders, and so forgets his early visions.

108-28. These lines were justly criticized by Coleridge for their obscurity; they express the poet's regret that the child's vision of the world should become 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought'.

129-67. He rejoices in the thought of these early visions because they are a proof that man is a spiritual being.

141-3. The feeling that material things are but shows and shadows, 'an insubstantial pageant'.

168-203. Though the beauty of the world no longer thrills us with rapture, yet we can cultivate a habit of sympathetic observation and so find in Nature a deep if quiet joy.

fields of sleep: either 'where they have slept' or 'sleeping fields'.

prison-house: the material body which confines the spirit.

farther from the east, i.e. from the source of light.

Nature's priest: one who is in peculiar communion with her and able to interpret her to others.

questionings: doubts as to the reality of the things our senses show us.

291 *I loved him not; and yet now he is gone*

THERE is the suggestion of the grimness of a mocking echo in the short line that seems to repeat ironically a part of each long one.

292 *There is delight in singing, tho' none hear*

THE more brief the poem the more concentrated should be its power and the more perfect its workmanship. Landor was a master of epigrammatic effect, but these lines do not well represent him. The reason for his silence on Shakespeare seems irrelevant; his brevity on Browning seems to need one. Bright plumage seldom accompanies either the gift of song or strength of flight. Browning was no singer of siren songs; and, if he had been, the Sirens, like Thomas Tucker, sang from no love of music.

Had Landor used a rhymed stanza he would have commemorated his friend by a finer poem.

LINES 7-9. Shakespeare and Scott, at least, are overlooked; and the description would fit Dickens better than Browning.

13. *Sorrento and Amalfi*: towns on the coast of Italy, where the Brownings made their home, within sight of the Siren's Isle of Capri.

295 *Whither, 'midst falling dew,*

DEW neither falls nor seems to fall; it is difficult to imagine *steps* that make the heavens glow; waterfowl with their rapid wing-strokes do not float on the air; their migrations invariably take place at night; and as vast numbers of migrating birds perish on their journey, the evidence for a guiding Power is not strong enough to justify the enthusiasm that informs the verses. The subdued tone of their music however should be compared in its effect with that of No. 146.

296 *Jenny kissed me when we met,*

THIS is no more a rondeau than it is a sonnet; interest in such highly artificial forms of verse did

not exist in England until Swinburne's day; but it is a very charming example of occasional verse, a delightful mixture of gaiety and pathos.

297 The mountain sheep are sweeter,

SIR Philip Sidney said that he never heard the Ballad of Chevy Chase but he felt his heart stirred as with the sound of a trumpet. But Chevy Chase has many dull stanzas; this poem has not a line in which battle, murder, or sudden death is not heard and seen. The rhythm moves with the swift-ness of the killers and with the same irresistible force; the images are as concrete and vivid as those of Beowulf; there is not a thought that might not have been uttered by Sidroc the Viking or sung by his harper. But the literary skill by which the difficulty of the feminine rhymes is triumphantly overcome is anything but primitive, and is equalled only by the writer of Hudibras in the seventeenth century and by Browning in the nineteenth.

298 Seamen three! What men be ye?

A DRINKING song should not have too much ballast nor need much explanatory comment. Most of them illustrate the proverb that when the wine is in the wit is out; this one, however, has both wit and humour, e.g. in lines 4, 11-13, and 18. A musician would have an easy and a pleasant task in setting these rhythms to the music for which they are so obviously intended.

The ancient jeers at the men of Gotham, e.g. that they tried to rake the moon out of a pond, are believed by Mr. Field (*The Myth of the Pent Cuckoo*) to express the contempt of the Anglo-Saxons for the race they conquered.

299 *I dug, beneath the cypress shade,*

THE similes in the last stanza are impressive, and, what is even more admirable, each gains in force by the contrast between them. There is no reason why the stone in the second stanza should be mossy; and that it has been moved is some reason why it should not be. The assonance of the pairs of rhymed words in the first and third stanzas, whether accidental or premeditated, is not happy in its effect on the music of the verses.

300 *To my true king I offered free from stain*

IT has been said that Macaulay, the greatest artist who ever wrote history, was lacking in pathos. These most moving lines sufficiently disprove the charge. No couplets in the English tongue, not even Cowper's on his Mother's Picture, are more touching and tender. And to be pathetic in couplets is the most difficult of all poetic tasks.

301 *Oh! wherefore come ye forth, in triumph from the North,*

THIS is not poetry of a high kind, for it tells nothing that could not have been told in prose. Yet it could hardly be told so effectively in prose, for the verse-form makes it possible throughout to make the sound of the words correspond with their sense, their movement suggest the action and spirit of the narrative. The leaping anapaests give the lines the velocity of a cavalry charge, while the frequent exclamations reinforce the sense of effort and energy.

Wherefore: the question is addressed to the sergeant by a Puritan of the south-west, whither Fairfax led his army after Naseby.

Man of Blood: Charles I.

Alsatia: the district now known as Whitefriars, east of the Temple; then a sanctuary for fugitives from justice. See *Fortunes of Nigel*.

39. *he*: the king.

302 *The primrwose in the sheade do blow,*

THE Dorset dialect is the most musical of those that still survive in England. Its charm depends not upon pronunciation but on the pitch of the voice; so that the full musical effect of this most melodious poem can be appreciated only by readers familiar with the Dorset speech. Yet the charming simplicity of its pictures will give pleasure to all. The rhyming of the last syllable of the fifth line with the first stressed syllable of the sixth gives a delightful and unexpected echo which should not be lost in reading.

clote: yellow water-lily.

bricken tuns: brick chimney stacks.

Paladore: Shaftesbury.

twile: toil, exert themselves.

303 *Since I noo mwore do zee your feace,*

MOST moving in its simple pathos. It does more than most of Wordsworth's poems to justify his belief that true poetry can be made from the actual utterance of simple men. There is not a word in it that a Dorset peasant might not use; better still, there are many that only a peasant would use—the single figure of speech, for example, *ride* in line 11 is perfectly in keeping; and so is the selection of detail. Only a countryman would know that the beech-leaves all lie horizontally so that the tree is flat-boughed; for which reason, after early summer, when the leaves cease to be translucent, the beech-woods are dark. And their gloom emphasizes the sadness of the bereaved husband.

304 *Roll forth, my song, like the rushing river,*

A WISE man has observed that complaints commonly excite more contempt than pity. That is certainly true when, as here, they are too obviously addressed to an audience of which their author is too obviously conscious. The finest thing in the poem is the form of its stanza, to which the alternating male and feminine rhymes give music, the prevailing iambic feet give dignity, and the occasional anapaests force and variety, while the short final line is effectively emphatic. Swinburne seems to have appreciated the form, and made it the base of one of his loveliest stanzas, that of No. 394. But he, of course, varied his rhythm from stanza to stanza, which Mangan was not careful to do, so that before we reach the end we are conscious of a feeling of monotony, as, to compare great things with smaller, we are in reading *Love in a Valley*.

LINE 3. The assertion is not borne out by the result.

5-8. A weak stanza; the first two lines convey no clear image, *eld* for age is archaic and affected, it is superfluous to say that lightning in veins is not visible, and it prevents the reader from remembering that its results may be.

Maginn: an Irish journalist who, like Mangan, resembled Burns only in his weakness for alcohol.

40. A clumsy periphrasis for 'price'.

305 *If the red slayer think he slays,*

IT was a maxim of Flaubert's that a fine poem signifying nothing was better than one less fine with a definite meaning. It is, of course, impossible for a fine poem to signify nothing; but, as this one shows, it is possible for a poem to seem fine by

reason of its music and its images and yet to mean very little.

307 *A good sword and a trusty hand!*

TRELAWNY, Bishop of Bristol, was one of the Seven Bishops imprisoned by James II. A large body of Cornishmen set out to march to London to rescue him, but at Exeter received the news of his acquittal. This song owed its popularity less to its own merits than to the belief, at the date of its anonymous publication, that it was a genuine old ballad.

St. Michael's Mount was to a Cornishman the symbol of impregnability.

one and all: the battle cry of Cornwall.

308 *With deep affection,*

THIS might be the result of a schoolboy's not very successful hunt for rhymes.

309 *I thought once how Theocritus had sung*

310 *What can I give thee back, O liberal*

311 *Yet love, mere love, is beautiful indeed*

312 *If thou must love me, let it be for naught*

313 *How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.*

'From the Portuguese' is an innocent deceit: all the sonnets are original, though the thought in No. 312 obviously derives from No. 97. All are imperfect in form, having no break between octave and sextet; and all but the last are lacking in what Rossetti called 'fundamental brainwork', which is revealed in the worst of all weaknesses—words used for the sake of rhyme alone. The last, however, towards which the others may be regarded as experimental

efforts, is one of the noblest poems ever written on Love. I would rather have written it than Shakespeare's No. 23.

314 *What was he doing, the great god Pan,*

'THE poet's fate is here in emblem shown.' The poem owes part of its power to the skill with which phrases in their natural rhythm are fitted into the verse-pattern; it owes more to the careful selection of detail and the concrete quality of its epithets, so that every picture is clear in the mind's eye; we seem not to hear of what is done but, through the stimulus to our imagination, to be present at the doing. If ever there was a fine example of the 'fine excess' which has been said to characterize poetry it is in the repetition of *sweet* in the sixth stanza. Only the five 'nevers' of *Lear* can compare with it for daring and consummate success.

LINE 3. *ban*: bane, harm.

4. The pictorial force of the line derives largely from *paddling*.

16. The epithets are charged not only with pictorial power but with emotional suggestiveness.

33. *Blinding*: a fine example of the poet's power to invest an old word with a new significance. No one but a poet would have used this word so, yet all admit its effectiveness for its new purpose.

42. A delightful example of alliteration. It suggests a wind that sighs and dies away among the rushes.

315 *Beside the ungathered rice he lay,*

316 *This is the Arsenal. From floor to ceiling,*

317 *Come to me, O ye children!*

LONGFELLOW is the American Tennyson, but in kind, not in degree. He had more sweetness than

strength, more power of expression than of imagination, more learning than originality, more industry than inspiration. In these things he was still nearer to Southey than to Tennyson; but he shared with the greater poet the secret of a music that can never be mistaken for any voice but his own. It is heard most characteristically in the second of these three poems. Like Tennyson, too, but as an American organ is like an English one, he had the power, illustrated in the following notes, to suggest by his music the nature of its subject. It will be an unfortunate generation that is not nourished upon Longfellow in its childhood and upon Tennyson in its youth.

NOTES TO 315

LINES 7, 8. The effect of the open vowels and of the shifting of the stress to *wide* should be noted.

11. *tinkling*. a happily chosen epithet in its musical suggestion.

19-24. A good example of Longfellow's power to 'paint in the number the nature of the thing which it describes', the anapaests in line 23, particularly, suggest the rhythm of a galloping horse.

25. The simile is vividly pictorial, but the too obvious alliteration makes the music meretricious.

31-6. The stanza is another good example of onomatopoeia.

46-8. A fine metaphor.

NOTE TO 316

Characteristic of Longfellow, alike in the individuality of its music and in its tendency to preach.

NOTES TO 317

There is here, characteristically, more sweetness than light. To reflective minds children suggest

perplexities rather than banish them; the image in line 15 seems meaningless; and the metaphor in the last stanza shows weakness of imaginative power; a poem has more life and influence than most of the children of men.

319 *Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night*

THE *Origin of Species* was published in 1859 and made the modern mind; this poem was published in the same year, and prophesied the modern soul. There had, of course, been individual minds in all ages who had 'managed without the hypothesis' of a constantly intervening Providence, just as there had been individual souls who said 'let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die'. But the implications of Darwin's doctrines have become a part of the consciousness of the millions who have never even heard of them; and no one to-day thinks about life at all without, in some moods, feeling about it as FitzGerald felt. Of his poem, even more truly than of Gray's *Elegy*, it may be said that to its sentiments every bosom returns an echo.

Mr. Chesterton, with less than his usual acuteness, observes that Omar's philosophy is not the philosophy of happy people but of unhappy people. *Cela va sans dire*; Omar's is admittedly only a philosophy of making the best of a bad business; happy people neither need nor have any philosophy, they have faith instead, and a creed, like that of Browning's *Ben Ezra*.

Omar Khayyám, 'Omar the Tentmaker', wrote his Rubáiyat, 'stanzas', when the Normans were building the English cathedrals and the Persians were laying the foundations of astronomical science; the Tentmaker, in spite of his name, lived on a royal pension granted him in the interests of scientific

research. FitzGerald wrote this version of his poem after taking up the study of Persian in 1853, when the new age of science was at the dawn. For a generation it was ignored and lay among the penny volumes on the secondhand bookstalls. No poem was ever so inexplicably neglected, and none so unreligious was ever so popular.

FitzGerald's poem is not a translation of Omar's; it is an English version of selections from it. But the spirit throughout is Omar's, and many of the thoughts and most of the images. The music, however, so gravely sweet, so exquisitely harmonized with its theme, is FitzGerald's own: not Milton himself speaks with a more authentic voice. Even his lapses are distinctively his own; no other poet could have been deaf to the cacophony of *Lift not thy hands for help to it—for it*, or *Not the knot*, or *About it and about . . . came out*.

His stanza, too, though it preserves the rhyme-plan of the original, is as peculiarly his own as that of *In Memoriam* is Tennyson's—even more so, for, though Tennyson reinvented it, his had been several times used before. FitzGerald's is the finer as well as the more distinctive creation. Its longer lines are better suited to their grave burden; his opening couplet, unlike a closing couplet, giving the ear a taste of rhyme, makes it expectant of more; his blank third line at once gives variety and increases appetite by delaying its gratification; and his echo of the first rhyme unexpectedly repeats an old delight. The occasional four-rhymed stanzas give both variety and a sense of reserve power, of luxury made richer by abstemiousness.

Its single rhyme makes this the easiest of all stanzas to learn by heart, for the first line gives the cue for all the rest. Yet, though its separate stanzas are easily learned, the poem as a whole is lacking in definite design, so that the stanzas have no

inevitable sequence and are therefore difficult to remember in order.

LINE 1. *the Bowl*: the sky, cf. line 205. No poem conforms so well with Milton's theory that poetry should be 'sensuous', i.e. concrete, full of appeal to the senses.

5. *Dawn's Left Hand*: the false dawn that appears on the horizon before the true one.

13. *the New Year*: which in Persia begins at the Vernal equinox.

15. *the White Hand*: a metaphor for the blossoms. See Exodus iv. 6.

16. The breath of Jesus was believed to have miraculous powers and to bring the flowers to life.

17. *Irám*: a garden like that of Kubla Khan.

18. *Jamshyd*: a mythical king, whose magic cup was used for divination.

21. *David's lips are lock't*: by death.

22. *Péhleví*: an ancient Persian language.

209-20. The gist of these obscure stanzas is that man's fate is predestined from the beginning of things. The Foal, Parwin, and Mushtara are stars. The Súfis were Mohammedans of a sect opposed to Omar. *The key* is a clue to the mystery of life.

222. *Wrath-consume*: an unhappily invented verb for consume in wrath.

Kúza Náma: Book of Pots.

234. *Ramazán*: the moon of fasting, the twenty-eight days during which Mohammedans take no food until nightfall.

262. *little Crescent*: the new moon, the sign that the fast was ended.

264. Now that the fast was over the porter was carrying wine. His knot was a pad worn to ease his burden.

Tamam Shud: it is finished.

320 *This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,*

THE stanza is ingenious and original, well worthy of study and imitation as an example of the artistic skill by which the conflicting demands of the aesthetic sense at once for repetition and for variety are reconciled. The lines rhyme in pairs, but are of unequal length; the first line of the first couplet is long, of the second short; the rhyme of the second couplet is again repeated, this time in a line of equal length; the short sixth line is suddenly followed by the long closing Alexandrine. There is constant change yet everywhere correspondence.

321 *I know not that the men of old*

THIS is what Wordsworth would have called a reflective poem. But its rhythm trips along as easily as the stanzas which tell how Gilpin's horse found a smoother road beneath his well-shod feet. Thoughts of any value are not so facile or so easily expressed.

323 *Deep on the convent-roof the snows*

324 *My good blade carves the casques of men,*

THE monastic ideal of chastity has been sometimes contemned as an evasion of divinely ordained purposes for the continuation of the human race. There is in human instincts as much evidence for the divine approval of the one as of the other. When the apostle reminded us that our bodies are the Temples of the Holy Ghost he was merely expressing in theological terms a universal intuition of the eternal conflict between flesh and spirit, the existence of which is of the very essence of man, and above all his attributes distinguishes him from the brutes. We know that as surely as night

follows day the human race must become extinct with the cooling of the globe, so that there is no divine purpose for its infinite continuance; and the monk who is willing that it should die out in the next generation has as much reason on his side as the man who would have it degenerate through eskimo stages back to the brutes and protozoa from which it emerged. These two poems are therefore as universal in their appeal as the poetry of love. And in the first of them at least there is a passion and a power as moving as any love poem that ever was written.

Restrained as the words are in what they actually say, there is felt in the sound of them a rapt intensity, a passionate conviction of reality. This sense of power without noise seems to be conveyed by the open vowel sounds, for the consonants are muted; there are no explosive *f*'s, few *d*'s or initial *n*'s, but many *s*'s and quiet *p*'s, until the last stanza when passion rises to the point of ecstasy and the expression grows correspondingly energetic with its numerous *r*'s.

It is not only the ear that is conscious of intensity; we are frozen with the intensity of the cold, and dazzled with the purity of the whiteness. Only one thing ever written is like this poem. It is the account of the Transfiguration.

'Sir Galahad' transports us less because its art, however admirable, is more self-conscious; we are divided between admiration for Sir Galahad's spirit and for Tennyson's poetry. In the very first stanza, for example, we almost forget the knight in our wonder at the marvellous literary skill with which the hurly-burly of battle is suggested in the sound of the first part and the sudden quietness of a truce in the last lines. And wonderful as it is, it is not, like 'St. Agnes', too wonderful to be explicable; groups of consonants, like *str*, *shr*, *spl*, *cr*, and *cl*,

k's, l's, and r's obviously demand much vocal energy and so are suggestive of force and action; while the alliteration of the soft *l's* in the last two lines makes a contrast of quiet music. So in the fifth stanza we both admire and can account for the contrast between the sound of streets dumb with snow, and the tempest that crackles. But it is only at moments that we forget the poet and are in the spirit with Sir Galahad.

325 *Break, break, break,*

It has sometimes been objected to *In Memoriam* as to *Lycidas* that it does not express sorrow for the person whose death it commemorates. But intensity of feeling, in poetry as in life, cannot be long maintained, and would be intolerable if it were possible. *In Memoriam* is not a dirge nor even a lament, its subject is not death but life, not Arthur Hallam but human hopes and doubts. His requiem is not there, but in these stanzas inspired by the sea that washes the cliff churchyard where he is buried.

326 *I come from haunts of coot and hern,*

THIS lovely vision of the course of an English brook illustrates the two special excellences of Tennyson, his peculiar power of observation that shewed him beauties of detail undiscerned by other eyes, and his command of a verbal music that is not only faultless in melody but is constantly suggestive of the sound or the movement of the things of which it speaks.

It is easy for us, when Tennyson has pointed it out, to notice, or even to remember, that the voice of the brook changes as it passes from the stony shallows to the deeper pools, that its fretted banks,

to a fairy eye, would look like the coastline of fairyland, that the sunbeams glancing through its overhanging foliage throw a network of light and shadow on its surface, but we should never, unaided, have appreciated these things for ourselves. Still less could we have made for ourselves the haunting and suggestive music that, once heard, is recalled to our consciousness by every brook we pass. Tennyson was, above all poets, one who might have said with the Frenchman 'I am a man for whom the visible world exists'. And certainly above all poets he makes it visible in all its beauty for his readers. Here, and not in its philosophizing, lies the imperishable charm of *In Memoriam*.

- 327 *As thro' the land at eve we went,*
328 *The splendour falls on castle walls*
329 *Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,*
330 *O Swallow, Swallow, flying, flying South,*
331 *Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white ;*
332 *Come down, O maid,*

THESE are 'songs' from *The Princess*, but any lover of poetry would grieve to hear them sung, except perhaps the first. To sing the others would be to defraud the English language of its due; for while any tongue can be made to sound beautiful if sung to a beautiful setting, such speech as this can be matched in beauty of sound by ancient Greek alone.

The English language is probably the most perfect instrument for the human voice, but it is also the most difficult to use; its words do not, like Spanish or Italian, 'sing themselves'; they demand selection and combination by a faultless ear if discord is to be avoided and melody achieved. Tennyson's

ear was the most sensitive that ever weighed the musical values of words. It made him almost as fine a critic as he was exquisite as an artist.

But perfection of language, like perfection in architecture, depends not only upon selection of material but upon its disposition. Order is Heaven's first law, and it is perhaps the Divine in man that demands a recognizably definite scheme as an essential condition of anything that gives him intellectual satisfaction. In prose that arrangement is primarily logical, but in verse the instinct of the creator is to compose and of the reader to demand in addition to logical sequence a more artificial disposition of the parts of his work so that its orderly arrangement is emphasized and made obvious alike to ear and eye.

The readiest way for a poet to give his work this appearance of design is to group his lines in stanzas of identical form; and the most obvious method of calling attention to this form is by the use of rhyme. So in No. 328 the rhymes not only gratify a natural appetite of the ear but, what is much more important, they satisfy the demand of the mind for order by revealing the structural parts of which the whole composition is formed. A passage of ordinary blank verse has no obvious unity because it has no obvious parts; it looks a fragment. And so, for most poems that are short enough to require a visible unity, rhyme is almost indispensable. Yet that it is not essential Tennyson shows in the three remaining songs.

In No. 329 he forms a stanza by the device of refrain repeated in every fifth line; in No. 330 he makes his parts apparent to the ear by using sentences each of equal length and by beginning each with an interjection, and to the eye by separating the sentences each into a group of three lines; in No. 331 he uses a similar device.

333 *Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,*

THE Victorians, one suspects, thought these stanzas the finest in *In Memoriam*. For domestic service was then cheap, and it was possible for most readers to satisfy their needs by merely ringing a bell. Our own disillusioned age reflects that church bells have been ringing for two thousand years without bringing these ideals any nearer, and ranks the lines with the pulpit eloquence of glib but shallow curates. It suspects that Tennyson got a fortune and a peerage not for his poetry, which deserved them, but for helping his more prosperous contemporaries to feel virtuous without sacrificing to virtue. For Lord Melbourne spoke for his generation when he said that he had every respect for the Christian religion until it was intruded into private life. Blount in his *Feudal Tenures* records a charter by which an estate in Berkshire was held on condition of the tenant presenting himself periodically before the king carrying two cocks and saying 'Here my Lord are two cocks which you shall have sometime but not now'. On some such understanding Tennyson presented these ideals to his contemporaries.

334 *Come into the garden, Maud,*

UNLIKE most of the songs in *The Princess* this one from *Maud* is more effective when sung than when spoken. The frequent irregularities in the rhythm give scope to the musician, but as they have usually no correspondence with the nature of the subject they have an awkward effect upon the reading—the quickening effect of the anapaest, for example, in 'and a hush' would be much more appropriate to 'and a rush'. Sometimes, however, sense and rhythm do correspond as in line 15 where the movement of the dancers is clearly suggested. The

words too, as befits a song, are pretty rather than powerful, except the magnificent hyperbole of the last stanza which is surely out of place among these pretty fancies.

337 *It was the calm and silent night!—*

THE first stanza too obviously recalls the grandest lines of Milton's *Nativity Ode*, and the poem is made ridiculous by the comparison. To take any line from this Hymn and compare it with the corresponding line of Milton is to have a revelation of the power of rhythm. Here every line is lifeless machinery, moving with the unvarying rhythm of a pumping engine; there every one has the varying force of human breath. The thought too, when it is not a reflection of Milton's, is as undistinguished as the rhythm. The verses would be more at home in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* than in a *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics*.

338 *The year's at the spring,*

THE lines are popular, especially among early risers—who are not always the most intelligent and critical members of the community, and they suggest the breezy interjectional style in which these virtuous folk exchange congratulations. The unusual rhyme-plan is characteristic of Browning's original and experimentalizing muse; as is the bold and careless acceptance of a rhyme to *morn*. Yet if the snail was really on the thorn so much the worse for the snail; and if it was on the hawthorn leaves so much the worse for them. The optimism of the last line is again highly characteristic.

339 *Give her but a least excuse to love me!*

A PAGE in love with his queen sings in the first lines of each stanza his lament that she is too high

and he too low for any service of his to gain her love. The rhyme-plan selected has obvious difficulties, since feminine rhymes are scarce. Browning, having chosen the game, refuses to play it—as is not unusual with him. Generally he cheats with a broad grin, but here he gravely drags in words that are obviously employed only to make a rhyme and yet do that imperfectly. A page who can do nothing but sing should take more pains with his music.

See, however, the Note to No. 343.

340 *Just for a handful of silver he left us,*

THE verses were written to reproach Wordsworth for abandoning his youthful attachment to republicanism. As a whole the poem has no more power to harm Wordsworth's reputation than to enhance Browning's. What sting it has is not in the tail—which is pointless, but in the first two lines with their striking and memorable picture. The rest shows more willingness to wound than power to strike; it has nothing else so swift and sharp and barbed.

No better example could be found to illustrate that essential attribute of poetry which Milton called 'sensuous', i.e. concrete, appealing to the senses. The historian would write, 'he abandoned the cause for the sake of a sinecure and a decoration'. But the poet shows us the man himself, with silver (not gold) coins in his hand and the ribbon of an Order in his buttonhole. And ever after when we hear of apostasy, that figure comes back to our imagination and that phrase to our memories.

341 *Oh, to be in England now that April's there,*

THE charm here is in the selection of detail. Instead of Shakespeare's 'daisies pied and violets blue'

and his 'cuckoo singing on every tree' with which everybody is familiar, we are shown less obvious but not less beautiful tokens of the Spring. The delight of those who know them is increased by finding their interest shared by the poet; and those who have not noticed them are interested to find that his observation is true when they examine the elm-tree, and learn to distinguish the white-throat and the different members of the swallow family, and note for the first time that the thrush *does* repeat his phrases, and that the morning dew, like the hoar-frost, both whitens the grass-blades and thickens them so as to give the turf the shaggy look of a hairy hide. And for both the poet has the gift of melodious and memorable expression, so that year after year as these things are noticed our memories shall find appropriate words in which to celebrate them.

343 *This is a spray the Bird clung to,*

344 *Let 's contend no more, Love,*

345 *Escape me?*

ARISTOTLE is not more the Master of those who know than Browning is the Master of those who love. There is nothing in their hearts that was not before in his understanding and nothing that is not articulate in his poetry.

His insight was, of course, intuitive · he was born to understand love as some men to understand mathematics; but also he had the experience denied to all other poets in being happily mated. Other poets, though perhaps not many, have been happily married, Tennyson and Wordsworth for example, but their wives were left in the Court of the Women when they entered the Holy of Holies.

There was never such perfect understanding and

communion between man and woman as between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett; and so there is no love-poetry to be compared with his in the completeness of its appeal—to men and women alike, and in both to the mind and soul as well as to the heart; no one else could have written the sixth, seventh, and eighth stanzas of *A Woman's Last Word*.

Unlike other men, unlike most poets even, Browning kept throughout his life the intuition of adolescence that love, like worship, is an end in itself; and as Meredith said that 'who rises from prayer a better man, his prayer is answered' so Browning holds, as here, that 'the chase takes up one's life'. Earthly love thus claims affinity with that 'love that seeketh not her own'. More than that: it is seen to be 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen', for like all human aspirations it is a hunger for eternity, which cannot be satisfied with the here and now, and is itself the witness either to some higher existence or to the utter futility of this one.

Browning believed of love and life that only he who loses shall find, and that 'it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive'.

Such a creed cannot be formulated in words; and it is therefore useless to complain that Browning does not express clearly what can only be suggested, and make visible what can only be felt. One might almost as reasonably object to Beethoven that he does not say what he means. True, words, unlike notes, have a meaning common to all: but also they can be used, as music can be used, to convey a message that varies with the individual hearer. Browning speaks like the Oracles of Delphi whose words each man must interpret as he might.

And yet—the contortions of the sibyl were no doubt impressive, but it is hard to see what value

they added to the message. So Browning's extraordinary resourcefulness in rhyming amazes us by its ingenuity, yet its value in emphasizing his meaning or in beautifying his music is certainly not obvious. How many readers who get to the end of *Life in a Love* observe that the last three lines rhyme with the first three though they are separated by the twenty intervening lines? And how much significance has been lost by those who have failed to notice it?

When Ruskin said that the perfection of language was the perfection of fine glass—it lets us see clearly without attracting attention to itself—he forgot that the highest use of glass is to show us far more than our unaided eyes could see, and that the most perfect language, like a lens, has powers that make it in itself worthy of study. Yet Ruskin was so far right that language should only call our attention to itself by compelling us to seek some explanation, not of its meaning but of the perfectness with which that meaning is felt to be conveyed. Some of Browning's language is of this kind; but much of it is rather like smoked glass, which is neither beautiful in itself nor effective as a means of transmission.

Mr. Chesterton defends it on the ground that its grotesqueness compels our attention; but unfortunately it does so at the expense of its subject. For his suggestion that 'there is a certain kind of fascination, strictly artistic fascination, which arises from a matter being hinted at in such a way as to leave a certain tormenting uncertainty even at the end' there is of course much more to be said. But that fascination only comes with the feeling that the thing the poet is hinting at is beyond the utmost resources of language when he has taken us as far as human speech can go. That, too, we sometimes feel in reading Browning; but more often we

feel that his language is merely making unintelligible what might be simply and clearly said.

346 *Let us begin and carry up this corpse,*

348 *Grow old along with me!*

BROWNING'S obscurity has naturally been accepted as evidence of his profound wisdom. His commentators have usually taken the line of Mr. Squeers and other professors of educational psychology: 'You are not a philosopher? Then I am sorry for you, for you would not understand.'

But the fact is that Browning was not a philosopher; and that though he is often profound he is usually, as in the sixth, seventh, and eighth stanzas of *A Woman's Last Word*, most lucid when most profound.

A Grammarian's Funeral and *Rabbi Ben Ezra* are commonly supposed to represent Browning's philosophical theory; they are, in reality, neither philosophical nor a theory, but intuitive and a dogma. Ben Ezra's exhortation represents Browning's creed, and the grammarian a life lived in accordance with it. The creed is, of course, the cheerful one that, ultimately, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds:

This world's no blot for us

Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good.

and

Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure

and

Man has Forever....

But all this he no more attempts to justify by argument than Burns attempts to reason us into believing his Love is like a red, red rose. If we believe him it is not because he has convinced us,

but because he has expressed for us our own intuitions or made articulate our own desires.

If Browning were really a philosopher we should be forced to choose between him and others; to accept or reject, for instance, his assertion that only fools propound the doctrine 'seize to-day'. Yet we learn by heart and we treasure in the memory both *Ben Ezra* and the *Rubaiyat*, the *Grammarian's Funeral* and the *Garden of Proserpine*. For all these give us an imaginative experience, and so enlarge our sympathies, and widen our understanding of the thoughts and moods of men.

350 *Come hither, Evan Cameron!*

351 *Old Tubal Cain was a man of might*

THESE may justify their inclusion by the instructive contrast they afford between the music of poetry and the jingle of verse.

352 *As ships, becalmed at eve, that lay*

353 *Say not, the struggle naught availeth,*

354 *Where lies the land to which the ship would go?*

THE second of these poems might perhaps be cited to oppose Swinburne's assertion that

There was a bad poet named Clough,
Whom his friends all united to puff.
But the public, though dull,
Has not quite such a skuli
As belongs to believers in Clough.

The imagery is impressive and convincing; the vivid pictures of material things bring home to us the spiritual lesson as Nathan's parable brought home his sin to David; and the music by which they are conveyed is not only memorable but reinforces

their appeal by its correspondence with them: it makes the ear hear what the eye sees—

The tired waves, vainly breaking,
or the drag in which the long vowels are mainly responsible, and

The sun climbs, slow, how slowly,
where the effect is due also to the repetition.

55 *O may I join the choir invisible*

THE poet who has only profound meanings and not the witchery which is to carry his expression of those meanings to our hearts has failed. The primary requisite of poetry is that it shall move us; not that it shall instruct us.' If these verses move us at all it is with irritation at the monotony of their unvarying rhythm. Single lines here and there are tolerable, though there is not one to arouse the ear and haunt it; but the same undistinguished cadence endlessly repeated becomes at last a dull drone, 'vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man'. A homily, however excellent, becomes worthless in bad verse.

56 *Airly Beacon, Airly Beacon;*

AN admirable example of the artist's power of concentration by means of selecting significant detail. We are told only three facts, yet their suggestive power is such as to put us in imaginative possession of the whole story and to impress us with that sense of tragedy which 'purges the soul by pity and awe'.

57 *'O Mary, go and call the cattle home,*

HERE again is illustrated the artist's characteristic power, which is not to tell us things but to

make us imagine them. Once more we are told little; yet that little so affects our imagination that it shows us all.

Ruskin in a perverse mood objected to the personification in the last stanza: 'the foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl', and to imagine so is to indulge 'a pathetic fallacy'. But no one is for a moment deceived as to the true nature of the foam, and every one is impressed by the figure with a deeper sense of the tragedy, so that by what is literally untrue the truth is carried alive into our hearts. He might as well have objected to 'I am the Vine'.

358 *Welcome, wild North-easter!*

THIS poem was written by a man who believed himself to be a poet, it displays the devices of poetry, and yet it is not poetry. There is here, at least in part, what Gray called one of the 'grand beauties' of lyric poetry, 'extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, and musical'. And yet it is not poetry. True, the expression is concise, but it has none of that pregnant, full-charged compactness (as of a seed which is the promise and, as it were, epitome of the grown plant) such as Kingsley himself gave us in 'Airly Beacon'. It is perspicuous, no doubt, because feeling as well as expression lie open on the surface; and pure, because Kingsley, as he himself tells us, strove to refine and polish his words so that the idea might shine brightly through them. But what of the third beauty in Gray's triad, music? The movement runs in 'English march measure' as Campion quaintly names it, and indeed it has the regularity and even the monotony of a quick-step. The staccato touch felt throughout is harsh and rigid. These short end-stopped lines cannot carry the poem, brief though it is, without

tiring the ear. The rhythmic swell, cramped and thwarted within the narrow limits of the single line, has nowhere space enough to gather and relax. And although the vowels are varied and feminine rhymes are used to prolong the cadence, yet far too many lines rhyme on short vowels, and so the music is 'hurt' as Burns said of the like defect in one of his own poems.

Yet it is not the defects of its parts so much as the general effect of the poem as a whole which ranks Kingsley's ode below poetry. The power of the poet both to raise and generalize human experience, so that his readers feel it as a revelation and yet accept it as 'almost a remembrance', this is missing. The experience is individual and remains so. And lastly, Kingsley's words have no more than their meaning. Apart from its message for the intellect, the language of great poetry reverberates with mysterious echoes of feeling and fancy. There are none of these delicate removes in the straightforward key of this poem. Perhaps, after all, they would be a little out of place in a hearty paean of English sports and sportsmen. But those who are not fox-hunters will prefer a wind that blows from a different quarter—the West Wind of Shelley.

359 *When all the world is young, lad,*

A FINE study in contrasts, spring and youth and vigour set against autumn and age and decrepitude. The change of pace in the second stanza must strike every reader, and it is not difficult to see how the slowing down is accomplished and the contrast achieved; we are pulled up at the end of every line by the necessity to 'clear the consonants', *old lad*, *stale lad*, *run down*, and *place there* must be taken slowly if the contiguous consonants are to be clearly articulated. The imagery drawn from old saws is

tellingly introduced and happily assimilated to the new, e.g. lines 4 and 12.

360 *O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,*

THE Captain was President Lincoln, who held office during the American Civil War and was murdered just when he had made victory sure. Whitman is the best known of a kind of writer, naturally produced in a democratic age, who confounds fluency with eloquence, forcible language with expressive power, the laws of society with those of artistic composition, and the right of a man to say what he likes with his freedom to say it how he likes; who supposes, in short, that the natural concomitant of free speech is free verse.

The earliest of these victims of Rousseau who confused the chains of tyrants with the restraints of artistic form was a far greater than Whitman, the insane genius William Blake, who in his moments of artistic vision wrote perfectly formed lyrics, and in his hours of insanity masses of drivel under the delusion that metrical form was a restraint upon expressive power.

But in fact, as all experience has shown, the conventions of verse-form are not a restraint but a stimulus to expressive power; they 'call out all the powers in the effort to triumph within the given conditions and make difficulty itself become part of its facility and joy'. As Lord Morley wrote of Comte, 'he justified his literary solicitude by the wholesomeness alike to heart and intelligence of submission to artificial institutions. He felt that after he had once mastered the habit of the new yoke that it became the source of continual and unforeseeable improvements even in thought, and he perceived that the reason why verse is a higher kind of literary perfection than prose is that

se imposes a greater number of rigorous forms'.

the earliest of our English critics most wisely served that 'it showeth more cunning in the maker by following the rule of his restraint'.

'Free verse' is, of course, a contradiction in terms, for verse, to be verse, must be 'turned' and therefore measured arbitrarily; it is otherwise indistinguishable from prose to the ear, by which all literature is primarily judged—for by the ear the rigorous system is most readily and most profoundly affected; men can bear to watch the techery of men but not to hear their groans.

It is indeed possible to write short passages of prose that have the music, and the concomitant emotional effect, of a poem. But such writing is difficult that only the greatest at rare moments have achieved it. All experience goes to show that without a definite pattern the artist is overwhelmed

by his material; even if the instinct of his hearers would demand it he would be forced to adopt it in order to make his creation beautiful.

Whitman's disciples, e.g. Miss Amy Lowell, protest that the business of the poet is 'to create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods'. But there are no 'new moods'; for while the head learns new things the heart for evermore practises old experiments'. Yet new rhythms, giving new expression to old moods, are created by every authentic poet, within the limits of his metrical form. The rhythms of Mr. Belloc's *South Country*, for example, or of Miss Fredegond Shove's *The New Ghost*, have the freedom of prose yet gain memorableness, to be found only in the rarest prose, by means of the metrical pattern in which they are set.

Whitman would have derided the saying of St. Thomas Aquinas, 'a thing is what it is on account

of its form; thus a vase is what it is not because of its material, clay, but because of its form'. Yet it is significant that this, the one poem by which he is commonly remembered, represents neither his theories nor his practice, but the age-old conventions against which he protested. For, apart from other and higher values, a regular form greatly facilitates the process by which a poem is retained in the memory; free verse may be read, but it will not be remembered.

In his preface to *Leaves of Grass* Whitman proclaimed his indifference to beauty. 'No one will get at my verses who insists upon viewing them as a literary performance or attempt at such, or as aiming mainly at art or aestheticism.' He will make plain statements 'of the facts of modern science and democracy'. Yet in this poem on which his fame most surely rests he tells us no facts about the career of a statesman and soldier, but, in the ancient manner of poets, shows us a vision—of a storm-tossed ship coming safely into haven, welcomed by joy-bells, and of her captain dying on her deck as she casts anchor. The convention is as old as the very oldest literature: 'then are they glad because they are at rest; for so He bringeth them into the haven where they would be.'

362 *The old mayor climbed the belfry tower,*

A POET'S business with narrative is not that of the reporter, to inform us of events, but to communicate to us the impression which his vision of them has made upon him. At the present moment the newspapers are full of the devastations wrought by floods in America; we say 'how dreadful!' and think no more about them. Yet having read this poem we shall never afterwards be free from a memory that at any time a stretch of grassland, a winding

river, a far off tower or even cattle at pasture may wake into consciousness. Such magic has the poet's art, so much more important is the telling than the story.

But indeed the story is not told: it is pictured. The poet's function is to move us through our imagination, and to the imagination rather than to the understanding he addresses himself; he shows us pictures and leaves us to arrange their logical order and so to elucidate the story for ourselves. Thus here the first picture shown us is not the logical beginning of the tragedy, but it is one that instantly excites our interest and curiosity. For more than eighty lines we are kept in suspense as picture after picture is shown us, while all the time our sympathy for the two women is growing and our sense of impending disaster deepening. Then suddenly we are shown the danger and learn what to expect. Yet again almost to the end we are kept in suspense until the last pathetic scene, one of the most moving in literature, when in the morning light we see the dead woman and her babies brought back to her own door. The poem ends with a lovely elegy that seems to consecrate an English landscape to the memory of the dead.

Something must be said of the pictures in detail. The shifting of stress in line 3 so that the heaviest accent falls upon *pull* is a fine illustration of the poet's power to find rhythms that are perfectly suggestive yet perfectly adapted to the metrical pattern, and the more impressive because not 'free'—like Samson in his chains.

The epithet *stolen* in line 8 is full of suggestion, and so is the detail of the frightened sea-birds, and the word *barren* with its vision of skies in which there was neither cloud nor warning of disaster, but the calm of a summer evening. *Day's golden death* is a vivid and memorable description of sunset, and

the single dark figure in the landscape is impressive because of its suggestion of the dark tragedy that was impending.

The long vowels in line 54 fill the line with sound as the bells fill the air; *lordly* in line 67 is a picture in itself; the quiet parenthesis inserted after line 82 is as moving as it is unexpected.

The long vowels again in the son's speech lend energy, yet are not so numerous as to slow the pace of his utterance; and the detail of boats adrift in the market-place is powerfully impressive of the imagination. In the question with which the stanza ends we hear a sob which would not be there but for the alliteration, though conscious alliteration never wrought such effects.

The quiet, even rhythm of the mother's answer is in marked contrast with her son's words and with the lines that follow. From this point the rhythm of the verse sweeps on like the flood it describes. The sound of the words, too, is highly suggestive, first of *thunderous noises*, and the bursting of barriers, to which the *r*'s, *b*'s, and explosive *f*'s largely contribute, and then, even more impressive, the momentary hush after line 114 in which the quick-beating pulse of the heart is heard, and the terribly quiet sound as of a great snake in the grass, the sudden rush of lines 117, 118, and the last wonderful correspondence of sound and image in line 118.

The detail in line 128, like that of the boats in the market-place, reveals the artist's instinctive choice of what is significant and impressive; by the same instinct the most exquisite music of the poem is reserved for the most moving scene in it, for 'our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought'.

Yet can any music be more exquisite than that of the milking song at the beginning of the poem, echoed with such moving effect at the end? Having

here nothing to tell, the poet is free to choose words for their musical values alone. And so she rings the changes upon all the vowels, but skilfully allows the long, open *o* to predominate, and makes artful alliterations in which *l*, the most musical of the consonants, is most frequently repeated, and fills the stanzas with sweet, feminine rhymes.

Even in the use of archaic spellings there is evidence of the artistic sense; they are just numerous enough to give a suggestion of 'old, unhappy, far-off things' without attracting our attention too much to themselves.

A comparison between the two similes in lines 104, 105 is of the highest artistic interest; the first is merely a description, any one could have hit on it; but the second is a revelation, a lightning flash that reveals not only outward seeming but inward significance. Only a poet could have seen the thing, and made us see it, so.

The device of repetition is employed with impressive effects; again and again the warning bells repeat their ominous message; and the old lady is never tired of telling us, nor we of hearing, that

A sweeter woman ne'er drew breath
Than my son's wife, Elizabeth.

363 *Come, dear children, let us away:*

THE writer of these lines reiterated in rather tedious prose that it was our business to learn to see things as they really are, that conduct is three-fourths of life and the function of poetry to teach us how to live, that Wordsworth, Scott, and Keats fall short of the highest because they do not apply modern ideas to life, that poetic values are identical with moral values—and he illustrates his theories by showing us things that never were, by making us sympathize with one whose conduct is heartless

and selfish, and by choosing for his theme a myth imagined in the twilight of the world. And when all his prose works are forgotten he will be remembered with Wordsworth, Scott, and Keats by poetry that makes us see things not as they really are but as symbols of things divine, that helps us not how to live but how to make the world come alive, and reminds us that dreams and not conduct are three-fourths of human life.

That a metrical pattern in no way hampers a poet in the use of natural rhythms is well seen throughout the poem; in the first section, for example, every line is a selection from natural speech, there is not even an inversion, far less a distortion, to make the words fit the pattern, and yet the beauty of art is added to the vigour of nature. So the words are selected from everyman's vocabulary, but they are such as not only tell us of things but make us feel their existence; we feel the power of the wind in line 4, and our bodies instinctively tend to move in sympathy with the restless horses. The pathos of the next section is no less in the sound of the words than in their meaning, the murmur of prayer is heard as well as told in line 72, the anapaests of the mother's song leap like her heart until her mood changes, and then the long vowels and repeated s's slow the music and hush it to the burden of sorrow. But the best in this kind is reserved to the last, when the lovely vision of a moonlit landscape is conveyed in music as exquisite as itself. The alliteration of *l* has never been employed with more delightful results.

The selection of pictorial detail reveals consummate artistic judgement; in a few lines, 35-45, we are given a complete picture of 'the bottom of the monstrous world', its atmosphere, its vegetation, its denizens and their doings; this is made possible by the suggestive power of such words as *spent*,

salt, ooze, coil, mail, sail ing, each of which 'concentrates in a moment of vision a thousand experiences'. So the 'stones worn with rains' are sufficient to summon up in a flash the vision of a churchyard that is the type and ideal of all the little graveyards we have known, and the little leaded-panes to make us see a whole church.

364 *Through the black, rushing smoke-bursts,*

ONCE again Matthew Arnold abandons his prose theories to give us pure poetry, stimulating our imagination by musical enchantment to create a dream-world of mist and moonshine in which the gods once more walk upon the earth. And for a moment we, too, are home again.

365 *Others abide our question—Thou art free!*

THE majestic march of the music and the noble diction of this almost perfect sonnet are admirably in keeping with its subject and with the grand and impressive imagery in which it is presented.

366 *In the deserted moon-blanch'd street*

MR. CHESTERTON has told us that men starve for words more than for bread, and that the supreme service of the poet is to find them a voice; in which saying he was anticipated by the earliest of our English critics, who in *The Arte of English Poesie* declared that 'many be the joyes and consolations of the hart: but none greater than such as he may utter and discover by some convenient meanes: even as to suppress and hide a mans mirth, and not to have therein a partaker, or at least wise a witnes, is no little grief and infelicity. . . . And yet it is a peece of joy to be able to lament with ease, and

freely to poure forth a 'mans inward sorrows and the greefs wherewith his minde is surcharged'.

In this poem Matthew Arnold finds a voice for the deepest and most universal feeling of men in this age of scientific industrialism. Science has taught man how to produce material wealth in ever-increasing volume but at the price of turning the men that produce it into the cogs of a huge and inhuman machine in which the individual is reduced to utter insignificance. At the same time it has shown him Nature as a blind force filling the earth with lives of which the vast majority are immediately annihilated and the rest survive for no purpose but to reproduce their kind. It has shown him the earth as an insignificant mote in an infinite sunbeam, and the mote itself as a world in which an infinite number of microbes wait for an opportunity to propagate themselves and incidentally to destroy other lives by plague and pestilence and agony, like maggots in a sheep. But it has not shown him that his own life is any more significant than theirs, his species any more permanent, his chance of personal immortality any greater.

This is the twofold danger of science: that men should see no purpose in their labour but that of obtaining the highest wage, nor in their lives but that of enjoying their bodily existence as fully and as long as possible; and that the type so constituted as to tolerate such conditions should become by the law of survival of the adapted the future representatives of mankind. They have already become the successful type in industry; the civilized world is full of illiterate millionaires who, without culture themselves, can see no purpose in any but technical education, and who think (so far as their cerebral processes can be called thinking) that if a workman owns an automobile it does not matter if he is him-

self an automaton. 'Their vision is machines for making more machines.' These be thy Gods, O Israel. And the two types pictured in Matthew Arnold's poem are the victims sacrificed to their worship. They are the dullards and the dreamers; the former doomed to a contented existence as wage-slaves asking no more of life and society than good food and housing and sport to bet on in return for the unthinking service of a machine; and the others, who should have given them 'nobler loves and nobler cares', with

that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged in them useless,
doomed to extinction.

371 *Go, for they call you, shepherd, from the hll!*

'THE grand power of poetry is . . . the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them.' Here, for once, Matthew Arnold's theory of poetry agrees with his practice of it: *The Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis* have laid a spell upon an English landscape and made it an enchanted country.

A man's life is rich or poor in proportion to the number of things he has learned to find lovely; the supreme function of the poet is to increase loving-kindness on earth by revealing more and more of earth's loveliness and so quickening our spirits to wonder and reverence, until

Where'er we tread 'tis haunted, holy ground.

For the 'new and intimate relationship' of which we become conscious when a poet shows us a thing is a spiritual relationship. To speak of 'the bluebell *trembling* by the forest ways' is to create a spiritual presence as real as that of the Scholar Gipsy him-

self, or, to the mere intellect, as unreal: for we *know* that the one is a botanical mechanism and the other a pinch of churchyard dust. So the causeway and the wooden bridge and the steep slope of the Cumnor Range, like

Those holy fields
Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nail'd
For our advantage, on the bitter cross

are mute but not insensate things. They move us as holy relics moved the men of the Middle Ages; for their very dust has fallen from the feet of prophets, priests, and kings who century after century used that approach to the ancient city, and we feel that surely, if we could but find it, there must be a spell to conjure up the presences of those who passed that way. Without poetry such a road has no more spiritual power than a new American speedway; but when a poet has passed that way the land is no more

Any common earth,
Water, or wood, or air,
But Merlin's Isle of Gramarye
Where you and I will fare.

The Scholar Gipsy must always mean more to Oxford men than to others. Yet those are utterly misguided who censure it as 'too topographical'; they might as justly so censure the description of the Heavenly City in Revelation that was seen 'in the spirit on the Lord's Day'; so, only, can be seen the 'sweet city with her dreaming spires'; she is not the Oxford seen by her municipal officials and city councillors. And indeed those who have never seen Matthew Arnold's country except as he has shown it to them have a very real advantage. Like Wordsworth before he visited Yarrow 'they have a vision of their own' beyond the reach of the

speculative builder; for us the half of Keats's line is true, but for them the whole of it,

For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.

Matthew Arnold, like Wordsworth whom he loved and studied, had two voices; and one was a dull drone. 'The other was a softer voice, as sweet as honey-dew,' and that is the voice in which he speaks of the Scholar Gipsy. Of all our poets he seems most to have needed the advantage of a highly organized stanza-form; this one, devised for *The Scholar Gipsy*, is more elaborate than any that had been used since Spenser; it challenged Arnold's powers where they were strongest, and enabled him to supply by poetic craftsmanship his deficiency in natural magic.

The long lines give the needed gravity of movement, but the marked change of length in the sixth not only adds variety but in so doing emphasizes at once the length of the others and the presence of a pattern. The rhyme-plan is devised with exquisite skill to excite and gratify the natural appetite of the ear, for the space of four lines we are kept upon the stretch, waiting for a rhyme; then we hear the first echo, of the end-sound of the second line; next, and unexpectedly, the fifth line echoes the third; and then at last we hear, what all this time we have been waiting for, the rhyme to the opening line. The device of suspense is abandoned: we are given rhymes rapidly, just as we had learned to wait for them, and so we enjoy the delight of surprise added to gratification. So much pleasure may be given by craftsmanship alone.

Craftsmanship too can effectively organize the matter so that, for example, instead of the prose-narrative opening 'There was very lately a lad in the University', we are allowed to overhear just enough of a conversation to set us wondering, then we are shown a delightful picture of high summer,

and while we are admiring it we suddenly discover that we are to have a tale as well. At last, by a skilful transition in the sixty-second line, we find the clue to the opening stanza and see our way through the story.

But what is beyond the reach of mere craftsmanship is the imaginative vision that recreates the Scholar Gipsy 'in his habit as he lived', and the poetic instinct that selects such details as enable us, in scene after scene, to visualize a whole picture, and such words as enable us 'in a moment of vision to concentrate a thousand experiences'. 'Strips of moon-blanch'd green', for instance, suggests in a phrase a whole landscape; we see the dark masses of trees against the sky, the heavy shadows below them, and the moonlight's white reflection on the dewy grass between. So the coat, the basket, and the stone jar make us look round in imagination and see, as the actual sight of them would do, the harvest fields and the men at work in them. Sometimes a single word, like *mossy* in line 104, is enough to startle into life the memories of all the barns we have known and to create from them an ideal picture of their type.

A delightful book of topography and local lore might be made of discourse arising out of the discussion of things and places referred to in the poem—if Miss Hayden were alive to do it. Here but a few points can be noted

Wattle is not the typical form of hurdle in the Thames valley, where willows are plentiful; it is more characteristic of the downland, being made of the hazels that flourish far from streams. Botanists have disputed over the species of the grass mentioned in line 28; Arnold, who was no botanist, probably had in his mind's eye not the *bent* of No. 358 but merely grass flattened by his lying upon it. The Hurst is the hill above Cumnor, crowned by a

small clump of elm and pine which forms a landmark for many miles round. In the days when the Thames was a great national highway Bablock Hithe (wharf) was a centre of distribution for the neighbouring villages; now, in spite of the motor-car, it is one of the most pleasantly secluded spots near Oxford. The elm of line 83 was probably the great tree at Tubney, a mile from Fyfield, which fell a few years ago, into the hollow trunk of which, as it lay prone, a tall man could walk upright. Thessaly has never been identified; I believe it to be a name invented and used by the Arnold circle alone. A more important, but perhaps equally insoluble problem, is the identity of that 'one who most has suffered', line 182. Tennyson, whose *In Memoriam* had lately won him the Laureateship, comes first to mind; but Arnold in his letters speaks so disparagingly of his intellectual powers that he can hardly have thought him 'our wisest'.

372 *Coldly, sadly descends*

VERSE that can be so read as to be indistinguishable from prose, and, when so read, sounds like inferior prose, can never be good poetry. And verse that read metrically produces a growing sense of monotony can never be good poetry either. The reader who experiments with these lines, beginning, say, at the fifty-eighth, will find them tiresome whether as prose or verse; and if he then turns back to the corresponding passages in No. 366, lines 37-73, and No. 371, lines 141-50, he will appreciate the value of a rigid, conventional pattern in helping a poet to cast his subject-matter into a mould of beauty. It is significant that the lines best remembered and most often quoted, 162-70, are those which have most resemblance to a regular stanza, being linked together as a group by the

rhymes *mind* and *kind* and the assonance of the last word. Form is ever the preservative of literature.

373 *You promise heavens free from strife,*

THE feeling that here seeks expression is the deepest-rooted in the heart of man; it inspired some of the most moving lines in pagan poetry, of which these verses are but the faint echoes, and the one supreme stanza of Gray's *Elegy*. To repeat aloud that stanza and then to read this poem is to appreciate the value of a test which Matthew Arnold suggested and Mr. Birrell has commended. In the one deep calls to deep, but in the other only mind speaks to mind; feeling is repressed by the cleverness of the argument. For antithesis, so skilfully used throughout, is essentially an artifice of prose; its appeal is to the intellect rather than to the heart. Here, one feels, was a theme that should have moved us profoundly but the poet lacks the passion to do it, in spite of his obvious verbal skill. Even the very striking thought in the closing couplet fails of its due pathos by being too epigrammatic. For the epigram shines in the mind but does not burn in the heart.

376 *Why, having won her, do I woo?*

EVERY man who has read the poem must remember the impression it made upon him; yet there are probably very few men who know it by heart. The reason is, I think, that the general impression we have of it is made by two or three lines of far greater poetic power than the rest, which have the additional advantage of occurring in the most impressive positions. The title and the opening question attract us at once; for both are memorable in sound and idea. And the noble and moving

image in the last four lines concentrates in itself the effect of all that the poet has been trying to express in the others.

377 My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes

To make us see and feel, a poet must convince us that he has first done both. That Patmore had done so before he wrote these lines no one can doubt. His child is as real to us, in virtue of two lines, as Paul Dombey in twelve chapters; his treasures might have come from our own childish pockets—particularly the red-veined stone and the glass that had ‘suffered a sea-change into something rich and strange’. And his mother, ‘who was patient’, surely we knew her too. We have seen our dead selves, and we get little satisfaction in comparing them with the present; for while we still occupy our lives in collecting coins and counters and stones and bottles we get less pleasure out of them, less comfort for our sad hearts. What toys we make our joys! What shadows we are and what shadows we pursue!

378 The murmur of the mourning ghost

THIS is, perhaps, not a great poem; for great poetry is that which appeals to all men in all ages, and this is likely to move only some men in any age and few or none in an age like the eighteenth century. Even we who are moved by it know that parts of our minds are unaffected, whereas, by the greatest poetry, sense and spirit and intellect are all alike stirred. Yet it is probable that those who do not care for this are incapable of getting the highest enjoyment from any poetry at all. For there is something present here without which poetry cannot exist: it is the appeal to the primitive in us, to

the buried being that does not reason or judge but imagines and wonders and fears. By that being poetry was first created and to that being it makes its first appeal. And it does so, as here, by using words as an incantation no less than as a means of conveying a thought or communicating a mood. He that gets no thrill from

The murmur of the mourning ghost
That keeps the shadowy kine

may well get other things from other poems. What he will not get is their poetry.

379 *The blessed damozel leaned out*

No two men could be more strongly contrasted than Milton and Rossetti; yet they are alike in this, that each at twenty-one had written an immortal poem, and that each beheld a door opened in heaven. And though Milton is immeasurably the greater artist, it is Rossetti's vision that most of us would wish to share, and Rossetti's poem that we learn by heart for our meditation. For his heaven, though so infinitely remote from the sphere of our sorrow, is yet not too bright and good for natures like our own; it is not so unlike 'this warm, kind world' as to make us, like Mimnermus, 'shrink in fear', not a place of 'sexless souls, ideal quires' but one where our loves remain and we

Live, as once on earth
Together, I and he.

Being what we are we find comfort in the thought that 'her bosom must have made the bar she leaned on warm'.

Even those who take a loftier, or a grimmer, view of human destiny must be moved by the beauty and the pathos of the poem, must feel its musical spell and the magic of its pictures. The latter owe their

power mainly to their maker's wonderful eye for a simile. The description from which we get our picture of the Blessed Damozel, for example, of her hair and her eyes and her voice, consists wholly of similes, and of that exquisite kind of simile which not only reveals and illuminates beauty but is in itself beautiful; when we are told that 'her eyes were deeper than the depth of waters stilled at even' we pause not only in reverence for the beauty of soul that looks out at us from those eyes but with delight at the image itself which called up our picture of them. We linger too over the music of the words by which the picture is conveyed; it is as difficult to surprise its secret as to describe a perfume, but it is as lovely, and as distinctive, as the scent of wallflowers or sweet-brier.

For though the stanzas are full of subtle variations, the same sweet, sad tune is heard in them all; and so in each of them a tune repeats itself thrice, with variations. The unifying note throughout is the alliteration of the most melodious of the consonants, the letter *l*. The loveliest lines will all be found to repeat it:

‘Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.’

‘Nothing the autumn fall of leaves.’

‘And the lilies lay as if asleep.’

‘When round his head the aureole clings.’

That last line illustrates too the effect upon the music that results from the skilfully arranged interplay of vowels; the reader must examine many lines before he finds one in which a vowel sound is repeated.

It is good to be able to render a reason, but when all is said and done we who love the Blessed Damozel do so with a love that passeth all understanding.

380 *O Earth, lie heavily upon her eyes ;*
381 *When I am dead, my dearest,*
382 *Remember me when I am gone away,*
383 *Does the road wind up-hill all the way?*
384 *Oh roses for the flush of youth,*
385 *My heart is like a singing bird*

‘A SWEETER woman ne’er drew breath’ than Christina Rossetti. And of all the songs that women have sung, hers are incomparably the sweetest and the most unforgettable. If the Blessed Damozel had written poetry it would have resembled Christina’s.

The two sonnets here printed do not represent her best work; they have, particularly the second, her music and her tenderness; but they are deficient, and the first one more especially, in that ‘fundamental brain work’ which her brother rightly asserted to be the distinctive quality of a great sonnet. Their rhymes are there to make music: that is of course; but they ought to be there also because no other words are possible to express the thought; and here one feels that they lack inevitableness. The second, with all its tenderness and pathos, too obviously owes its inspiration to Shakespeare’s ‘No longer mourn for me’. And yet after all, perhaps, that should be its praise. For what finer thing can be said of a sonnet than that it is the feminine counterpart to one of Shakespeare’s, with the woman’s tenderness contrasted with the man’s strength.

Still, to me, the songs are her loveliest things, the simple pathos of ‘When I am dead’, the grave irony of ‘Up-hill’, and the rapture of ‘A Birthday’. ‘Up-hill’ is her greatest poem. There sweetness and strength are equally present. Strength is in the monosyllabic words, for as each syllable is a word

with its own distinct idea, the maximum of effect is concentrated in the minimum space. But there is power too of a far rarer kind, the kind which has been said to be the distinctive possession of the highest order of intellects, and which is so subtle that only sensitive minds are even conscious of it, the gift of irony. In each stanza a simple mind asks a question; and in each an answer is returned that besides its obvious meaning for the simple has a hidden suggestion of graver, more sinister import: 'they will not keep you *standing* at that door'. It is when we remember that we must be carried to it feet first that the full power of the line thrills us. Such a power, I repeat, is very rare in poetry; it invests the poet with something of the awe of the prophet. It makes Mr. Kipling's 'St. Helena' one of his most impressive poems.

The monosyllables have the further effect of slowing the movement so that the words strike upon the ear in grave succession like the strokes of a tolling bell. This not only accords with the prevailing mood of the poem but often with its particular images; the movement of the first line, for example, wonderfully suggests the laboured progress of an up-hill journey. That line is noteworthy too as helping to confute the heresy of the lawless versifiers, that strength is sacrificed to sound when words are formed into a metrical pattern. These words are so selected that the strength of natural rhythm is preserved with the beauty of metrical form added to it, so that truth and beauty are made one.

For me, the song between the two sonnets concentrates the essential thought of both in a form more memorable than either. Never was alliteration more artfully contrived so that part should be seen but the greater part only felt, until search is made for the hidden source of musical delight and

we discover the subtle pattern of repeated *r*'s and *m*'s and *l*'s.

The similes in Christina's 'Birthday' remind us of her brother's in the 'Blessed Damozel'; each gives us a lovely image of itself as well as a revelation of the singer's mood. A bird singing by its nest in a riverside tree: where are two lines so full of lovely images? And where is a heart so full of joy? Beautiful suggestions are crowded into these two stanzas, as into the last two of *The Scholar Gypsy*; but here they are relevant as well as lovely, whereas Arnold's elaborate simile is so long-drawn that its primary purpose is almost forgotten before its picture is complete.

No. 384 is the most song-like of the group: it has more imagery than thought, more sentiment than passion; and gains rather than loses by being set to music.

386 *On the Sabbath-day,*

MOST readers of English poetry, if shown this poem for the first time, would pronounce it to be one of Edgar Allan Poe's. It recalls 'the tintinabulation of his bells, bells, bells', and the sentimentality of his 'Annabel Lee'. How inadequate the music is to its theme will be revealed most effectively if the verses are read aloud and followed immediately by Ernest Dowson's 'Sub Regno Cynarac'.

In the one, passion gains power from the rhythmical pattern; in the other, its appeal is hindered by it. A rhythm which helps us to feel the spirit of *King Henry of Navarre*,

The king is come to marshal us in all his armour
dressed

cannot avail equally to communicate the mood
appropriate to

A purple stain of agony was on the mouth I kissed.

Here the verse-pattern does weaken the natural force of the words; but that is because the pattern was ill chosen for its purpose.

387 *'You must be very old, Sir Giles,'*

388 *There were four of us about that bed;*

389 *Had she come all the way for this,*

THREE pictures of 'old, unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago', each in its own way absolutely perfect; but age will muse longest on the first, childhood thrill most at the second, and adolescence be moved most by the third. For the old will look back forty years and not four hundred, and forget that Sir John was a knight and his lady a duchess; Sir John's soliloquy, like Hamlet's, is Everyman's. If one did not know the poem to be Morris's one would say 'aut Browningaut diabolus'.

In 'Shameful Death' and 'The Haystack in the Floods' our interest is a less personal one.

The knights are dust,
Their good swords rust.

Yet for a space, by the magic of poetry, they live and die again, and for a space we are snatched from out this bourn of time and place and carried back through the centuries. In neither poem is a story told us: we are merely given some scenes of medieval life which so powerfully affect our imagination as to make it suggest far more than is told us, both of the history of the persons and of the spirit of their age. The details in the first stanza of 'Shameful Death', for example, are so skilfully selected that we not merely see the picture as clearly as if a great artist had painted it for us but we know what is essential in the life of each person in it, their relations with one another, their ages, religion, state of life, even the future for some of

them. So in the picture of 'the place where the hornbeams grow' we create the whole out of almost nothing. We see men and trees in such a light that we can scarcely distinguish the one from the other. Those who know the hornbeam marvel at Morris's instinct in choosing that tree, for the lines of its trunk and branches have an eerie resemblance to those of human limbs; but those who do not may marvel equally, for there is something mysteriously suggestive about the very sound of the word. So there is also in the names of the recreant knights. Sir John reminds us of that earlier monster in our oldest story, who also lurked in the fen; and Sir Guy's dolorous blast of the 'thrice-accursed sail' that warned a countryside to abandon their homes if they would save their lives.

The contrast of the last stanza, and especially of the last line, is a very notable thing. There is not merely the contrast in thought, so suggestive of the medieval spirit, but the contrast in tone, the grave, quiet speech after the vigorous utterance in the preceding lines.

'The Haystack in the Floods' affects us still more poignantly because we are made not only to see the sufferers but to hear them. And the words the poet finds for them are as suggestive as the circumstances in which we are shown them. Every detail suggests misery without and within; in two words, *dripping*, *leafless*, we have the most depressing time of year, the dismal day, the lowering sky, discomfort without, sadness within. All through the poem we are conscious of the miserable weather; the day and the deed are in keeping; and the soaked haystack, dreary and insensible, is the dominating feature in the landscape. Even the heraldry, instead of brightening the scene, adds to its sinister aspect, for Godmar's lions 'grin dismally' on his banner.

Every word spoken, even the forced cheerfulness

of Sir Robert, impresses us with dread: Jehane's sinister allusion to the trial of sorceresses, her terrible threat to bite through Godmar's throat, and his own dark references to the charges against her and to the fate that awaited her. The action, too, becomes progressively more dreadful: instead of the expected fight there is first treachery, then torture, murder, and a horrid butchery. But perhaps Jehane's last slight but significant act is the most dreadful of all; for we know that, like Lear, she has been driven mad by her suffering.

390 *Pray but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips,*

THE loveliest of all Morris's poems. It probably owes its inspiration to his friend Rossetti's 'Blessed Damozel', but its haunting music and its magic picture of a landscape at dawn are his own. It is a poem to make a man rise before day-break or, better still, sleep out of doors in June to see the dawn as Morris shows it. It has made one man at least search a country-side for 'a lone house in the midst of the corn' and find it with a thrill of joy.

Morris professed to believe that poetry could be made like tapestry or furniture—by skill in craftsmanship; this poem, at least, has what no mere technique can give—a sense of a brooding mystery alike in the atmosphere of the picture and in the music of the words. We feel that beyond its obvious meaning there is a hidden significance: that there is more in the shadows than we can see, and that nature is somehow aware of it. It is this power of making us doubt reality that distinguishes the poet from the craftsman in verse.

A craftsman might have found so telling a word as *waneth* to suggest what Milton meant by 'scattering the rear of darkness thin', might have noted the impressive effect of the dark masses of the elms and conveyed it to us by the epithet *heavy*; might even,

though hardly, have conceived the exquisite image of 'the tender, bowed *locks* of the corn'; and might certainly have avoided the clash of *dawn* with *corn* in lines 11, 12 by substituting *morn*. But his poem would not have left us, as this one does, feeling that 'the things which are seen are temporal'.

391 *As we rush, as we rush in the train,*

THE poet of 'The City of Dreadful Night' is not well represented by these verses. The apparent motion of the trees and houses can hardly be seen from a lit railway carriage by starlight; the stars are so distant that any motion is imperceptible, however swiftly they move or we; their resemblance to doves in a forest is beyond the visionary powers of any ordinary imagination; and they are too cold, remote, and inscrutable to give us any feeling of companionship. Shakespeare, who, unlike Mr. Hardy, did not know the horror of the stellar distances, knew that 'to love a bright particular star' was the extreme of human extravagance; but to 'rush on' merely for the sake of rushing, though it seems to be the modern ideal, is equally foolish to a contemplative mind; if fear were present there would be more sense in it. The charm of seductive music might have lulled us into a less sceptical mood. But here neither is the rhythm suggestive nor the melody intoxicating; the lines are so near prose that they invite us to judge them coldly as statements of matter of fact.

392 *Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow,*

393 *Here, where the world is quiet;*

394 *In a coign of the cliff between lowland and high-
land,*

By that great body of estimable Englishmen represented by the master mason in 'A Pair of Blue

Eyes', who find cauliflowers more exciting than passion-flowers, the poetry of Swinburne is vaguely believed to be unedifying. They assume, with Dr. Johnson, that a book should help us either to enjoy life or to endure it; as their ears, like his, are usually deaf to the finer harmonies of words, and their prejudices all in favour of making the best of both worlds, they find little to attract them in a poet whose song is full of the transitoriness of this one and the uncertainty of the next.

It is true that Swinburne never attempted in his poetry 'to justify the ways of God to men', but it is also true that Milton, who did, only succeeded, like Swinburne, in giving us by means of musical enchantment an imaginative experience; for 'after all', as the mathematician said, '*Paradise Lost* proves nothing'. Milton is a greater poet than Swinburne because he gives us greater experiences, and not because he teaches us a different doctrine.

The function of poetry is not to save our souls, but to make them worth saving; and the souls most worth saving are not those that have taken refuge in 'a fugitive and cloistered virtue', but those that have eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and have said with Terence, '*homo sum nihil humanum a me alienum puto*'. Swinburne's doubts and desires are natural to men, and must be faced by those who would obey the maxim 'know thyself' and would 'see life steadily and see it whole'.

The charge of pessimism sometimes brought against him, as against Omar, cannot be sustained; for a true pessimist would not be at the trouble to preach his doctrine. Swinburne is like the man who thanked God that he was an atheist: the very vitality of his protest against life is proof that he found life worth living because he found in it something worth doing.

But even were it otherwise, the man who is led into evil by the poet would be led into it without him; and without poetry his state would be the worse, because he would lack the sympathy which might be his redemption. For poetry exists so that the strong man should not be the hard man, to give us emotional experiences far beyond any that we could, or would, achieve as the result of our actions, and so to make us understand and sympathize with the sinner and the heretic, however sternly we condemn the sin or repudiate the doctrine.

Another charge often brought against Swinburne is that he makes 'an intoxicating music that has little definite meaning'; but that charge could be made against Mendelssohn or Bach. It is true that we usually expect from a poet something for the intellect as well as for the senses and that the greatest poets give us both in equal degree. But those who refuse to be charmed by the exquisite music of 'Itylus' because its meaning does not very much matter might with as much reason refuse to listen to the nightingale itself. At the lowest our delight in Swinburne's musical magic may be an antidote to the spasmodic utterance of the free-verse makers and save us from forgetting the first canon of poetry—that it must charm the ear before it can disturb the spirit.

For, as he himself reminded us in *A Study of Shakespeare*, 'as the technical work of a painter appeals to the eye, so the technical work of a poet appeals to the ear. It follows that men who have none are as likely to arrive at any profitable [appreciation] of Shakespeare as a blind man to appreciate the colours of Titian. . . . For the inner and the outer qualities of a poet's work are of their very nature indivisible; so that any criticism is of necessity worthless which looks to one side only, whether it be to the outer or to the inner quality

of the work.' In No. 392 two nightingale myths, those of Itys and Itylus, are confused. But the charm of Swinburne's poem has little to do with either story; it is in the tune to which the words run, a sweetly monotonous music that, without cloying, lulls the critical sense asleep so that the images become 'like sweet thoughts in a dream'; not until we wake up do we think of asking what it all means.

Swinburne shares with poets much greater than himself the secret of making a verbal music that is unmistakable and inimitable—and also to a great extent inexplicable. He usually prefers a pattern of dactyls, but always varied and slowed in pace by additional stresses. Always, too, as here, he employs to the full the aid of alliteration and the double harmonies of feminine rhyme. Lastly, he selects every word primarily for its musical values, so that his lines are full of open vowels and liquid consonants with never a harsh combination of letters.

One little musical device here illustrated is of interest because it has been since used with subtle effect by Mr. Masfield; it is a sudden and unexpected echo that is often very beautiful, as in 'fleet sweet swallow', 'the light of the night on the dew,' or 'an inland island', but has sometimes the effect of a jingle, as in 'all night till light is born'. With Mr. Masfield it is always successful and may be noted in some of his loveliest lines:

'The mumbling, grumbling, humble-bees . . .

And a rambling bramble binds his knees';

'The old, bold mate of Henry Morgan';

'With roses in red thread worked upon her sails';

'Bringing the springing grass';

'Apple orchards blossom there, and the air's like wine'.

The stanza of the 'Garden of Proserpine' is one of the most beautiful patterns that even Swinburne ever devised. The opening quatrain with its two

kinds of rhyme alternating gives all that the most exacting ear for rhyme could demand, but we are then surprised and delighted by the magnificent excess of three feminine rhymes in succession, and the whole is crowned by yet a third repetition of the rhyme of the second and fourth lines. To carry such an intricate and difficult pattern successfully through ten stanzas is an astonishing exhibition of craftsmanship, even though some of the stanzas have more melody than meaning. That, at least, cannot be said of the first, second, sixth, ninth, and following stanzas, which, whether or not we agree with their doctrine, are worth, in poetic value, all the hymns that have yet been printed.

The stanza of 'A Forsaken Garden' is almost equally admirable; again the contrast between masculine and feminine rhymes is put to melodious use; and the emphasis achieved by the short final line has very impressive results in many of the stanzas; its effect is increased by the contrast of its predominating stresses with the anapaests in the previous lines: they bring us up like the sudden stroke of a knell.

396 *We are the music-makers,*

O'SHAUGHNESSY would have been better served if only his first three stanzas had been included here. After them the thought and the music alike grows thinner and the images vaguer and less arresting; at last even his grammar fails the poet, and we have *ye*, in line 56, used in the accusative case.

But the music in these first stanzas is a new note in English poetry; though the style of the verse is Swinburne's, with its pattern of feminine rhymes, its dactylic movement, and its marked alliteration, yet the resulting melody is quite distinct from his.

It conveys no powerful feelings nor memorable thoughts; but for those who have never understood that words have beauty of sound as well as a meaning O'Shaughnessy's poetry may be a revelation and an introduction to higher things.

It may be noted that two stanza-forms are here used, of which the first, with a common rhyme linking the two quatrains and so unifying the whole, is by far the more beautiful. But, owing to the scarcity of feminine rhymes, it is also by far the more difficult, so that the poet is not only forced to substitute a simpler form in many of the stanzas, but, which is much worse, descends to false rhymes, as in the eighth stanza, where *morning* is made to rhyme with *dawning*. A greater poet would have remembered that 'it showeth more cunning in the workman by following the rule of his restraint'.

397 *Out of the night that covers me,*

THESE lines, which might have been inspired by that most impressive scene in all the Waverley Novels in which Burley springs to meet death, 'hoping nothing and fearing nothing', should be read with Browning's 'Prospice', No. 349. The Christian and the pagan outlook on human destiny have never been so powerfully contrasted, and that both poets should be Victorians throws a light on the religious perplexities of their age. Browning, of course, has the easier task; our wishes are all on his side. Yet it may be suspected that his picture of what is to be faced will alarm more believers than his professed fearlessness will convince doubters. The 'heroes of old' may be *his* peers. But few of us could make the same claim so confidently. There, too, is the weakness of Henley's poem. His also is a doctrine for heroes to die in. Those of us who are not heroes are awed with admiration that a man

should voice our fears so plainly and face them so indomitably. But, like Johnson's friend who had tried to be a philosopher, we feel upon reflection cheerfulness breaking in; 'if hopes were dupes, fears may be liars'.

Both poets protest too much; it is as if they were talking bravely to make themselves brave. When we thus suspect a man's language to be stronger than his convictions we may know that we are listening to rhetoric.

Rhetoric like this, with its noble, full-sounding diction and magnificent images, is as immediately impressive as poetry itself, and only to be distinguished from it by its final results. For while the power of poetry grows upon us the more we consider it, the influence of rhetoric is weakened by reflection.

398 *Glory be to God for dappled things—*

THIS making of a poem by what may be called the inventory method at once brings to mind Rupert Brooke's 'The Great Lover'. Here, however, the catalogue is not a random list of lovely things which have only their beauty in common: the details are selected on a definite principle, that of contrast; the things are chosen not merely for their beauty but for that particular kind of beauty which derives from contrasted colours—of stubble with ploughland, for example, or of chestnut with white.

But there is contrast too where we should not wish to find it, where it makes not for beauty but for discord: between the images and the staccato music in which they are conveyed, appropriate enough to a catalogue, but not transmuting it into beauty. There is contrast again in 'rose-moles', which is actually repellent and illustrates the fasci-

nation of the ugly noticeable in the war-time. Moles are always blemishes, and a red one would be a disfigurement.

The music, such as it is, is of that primitive kind which depends upon strong alliteration. The simile of the brindled cow reveals its object without transfiguring it and might have been invented by a dairyman; but the metaphor of the fresh firecoal is a flash of poetic genius by which we see the chestnut as something rich and strange, 'burning bright', illustrating Shelley's saying that the function of poetry is to make familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar.

399 *Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!*

THE rapture and the images alike are forced; the exclamatory style is artificial, not artless; and has a childish crudity without a child's naivety.

400 *In our old shipwrecked days there was an hour,*

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER COUCH refers to 'Modern Love' as a sequence of sonnets of sixteen lines. But these groups of lines have really little in common with the sonnet; the unit of the pattern is a simple, four-lined stanza; and the poem would have looked more attractive, and have lost nothing in significance, if printed like 'In Memoriam'.

As in all Meredith's stanzas, the rhythm, though strongly individual, varies little from stanza to stanza, so that it becomes monotonous before the end of the poem is reached and, which is worse, fails to emphasize the significance of the words by means of its suggestive power. The line conveying the central thought, for instance,

We are betrayed by what is false within
is smooth, glib, and unemphatic, and identical in

rhythm with such a very different line as the first. Shakespeare, wishing to say the same thing, makes a line in which the stresses are so arranged to fall on the important words that for a moment they invest the utterance of the senile Polonius with the emphatic power of a prophet:

This, above all, to thine own self be true.

Yet that Meredith had the essential poetic power of reinforcing his images by the suggestive power of sound is evident from such lines as the twentieth and twenty-first, in which, mainly by virtue of the labials in the one and the sibilants in the other, we *hear* as well as *see* the waves burst on the shore and then rush in darting tongues far up the beach.

Meredith's theme here is the profoundly true one that the gratification of illicit love is even more a blunder than a crime. As the late Sir Walter Raleigh once said 'Men pay with their lives for passions that are neither profound nor noble, and this itself is not the least part of the pathos of humanity'.

401 *King Philip had vaunted his claims ;*

DOBSON the ingenious craftsman and student of foreign verse-forms is better represented in these lines than Dobson the poet of 'Before Sedan'. The ballade, an exotic imported from languages far richer in rhyme than our own, must always be a *tour de force* and have an obvious artificiality in English. This is not poetry, but an ingenious game of rhyme-hunting. Yet its patriotic sentiment and its appropriate sprightly air will endear it to many.

402 *Gird on thy sword, O man, thy strength endue,*

A RATHER better hymn than most in the hymn books—it goes to the tune of 'Abide With Me'—but

not one of Mr. Bridges's great poems. All the thought and passion diffused through it may be found concentrated in a far more memorable and impressive form in the tiny poem beginning,

I love all beauteous things.

The one line here out of keeping, alike in tone and thought, with the didacticism of the hymn-writer is that profoundly impressive one which reminds us of the incredible remoteness of our origin in the loves of our pre-human and primitive ancestors 'in the forgotten night' of the cave and the forest.

404 Beautiful must be the mountains whence ye come,

OF the poems of Mr. Bridges here included, this is probably the best known as it is certainly the most characteristic: its music has the unmistakable quality which belongs to him alone. But while every authentic poet has his own recognizable music, the greater poets have always added something new to the common technique. This poem is again characteristic because it illustrates Mr. Bridges's contribution to the resources of English poetics. By using free rhythms while retaining a rigid verse-pattern he has at once given to his verse the spontaneity and power of natural utterance and refuted the literary anarchists who asserted that these qualities were incompatible with the restraints of a fixed metrical form. He has realized, too, that with the use of free rhythm rhyme becomes of still greater importance in giving definition to the verse-pattern, and so his finer lyrics are characterized by a highly elaborate pattern of rhyming words. In 'Nightingales' the plan is less intricate, but the presence of a pattern is insisted upon by means of coupled rhymes and by the regular alternation of two long bursts of rhythm with a single short one.

405 *Yet, O stricken heart, remember, O remember*

THOUGH Stevenson has told us that he 'played the sedulous ape' to the great masters of English, there is nothing in his prose to indicate which of them influenced him most. In his poetry, however, and in this poem in particular, there are clear traces of Meredith's influence. The rhythm is a faint but unmistakable echo of 'Love in the Valley':

Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting;
So were it with me if forgetting could be willed.
Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling well-
spring,
Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled.

Stevenson, however, has enriched the stanza-form by an additional rhyme.

The slight change of pattern in the stresses of the last line is extraordinarily disproportionate in its effect: it gives the suggestion of absolute finality to the sound of the line.

406 *Given, not lent,*

IN a fine lyric, rhyme occurs as a beautiful but natural coincidence between the thought and the word necessary to its perfect expression: it has the effect of inevitableness: of marriage made in Heaven. Here, however, the words are not married but matched: they are used, not as the only possible form of expression, happening incidentally to rhyme, but as words dictated by the necessity of rhyming, which happen also to make sense. Thus *lent*, having been suggested by *given*, a rhyme had to be found for it, *sent*, which suggested the otherwise valueless second line. So the obvious thought of *son* demanded a rhyme and produced the vague but easy *one*. And *year* suggested *dear* and *song* long in a line where the too facile device of repeti-

tion does little to emphasize the idea. 'If this is poetry,' said Morris of his early lyrics, 'it is damn'd easily written.' But verse that is obviously written without labour is almost always obviously without poetical merit.

407 *Thou man, first-comer, whose wide arms entreat,*
POETRY must have, if not meaning, at least musical magic. These lines seem to have neither.

408 *As I went down to Dymchurch Wall,*

ONE function of poetry is to enable us to say, as Aubrey records that Bishop Barrow exclaimed with his dying breath, 'I have seen the glory of the world'. Such a revelation may be denied to the globe-trotter yet vouchsafed to one who has never left his native village if he has shared a poet's vision of it and learned to love it with a poet's love. The south-eastern corner of England has been fortunate in the number and quality of the poets who have known and loved it and transfigured it for us in their verse. Mr. Belloc's 'South Country' and Mr. Kipling's 'Sussex' are the loveliest things ever written about England. 'Romney Marsh' has not their magic power to show us England as 'Merlin's Isle of Gramarye'; it lacks the deep personal feeling of the one and the enchanter's spell of the other. Yet it may help

To make this earth, our pilgrimage,
A cheerful and a changeful page.

The thin vowels in *ringing shrilly*, repeated in *within the wind*, are very suggestive of the high-pitched note of the wind in the telegraph wires. *Wound* in the second stanza and *flowed* in the next line are more important^a as rhymes than for their pictorial accuracy.

410 *O world invisible, we view thee,*

It might be thought that what was said of No. 407 applies also to Francis Thompson's poem. But while Thompson too is unintelligible, he does convince us that if we could understand we should admire, that he is unintelligible only because his vision is inexpressible, and that it is our material limitations more than his verbal ones that prevent us from fully sharing his rapture. For his language, though its complete significance eludes us, gives us in thunder-rolls and lightning flashes, unforgettable glimpses of his meaning. Such phrases as 'Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors' and 'the many-splendoured thing'; such visions as those of

The traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross

and

Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames,

even apart from their context are felt to be of the kind that makes 'the mind a mansion for all lovely things, the memory as a dwelling-place for all sweet sounds and harmonies'.

411 *Drake he's in his hammock an' a thousand mile
away*

MAKES an effective recitation at a school concert, for which purpose it has filled the place occupied in the last generation by 'Casabianca', over which it has the advantage that its subject is a national hero, and that some of its language reproduces the most musical of the dialects yet remaining to us. The reference to Drake's 'old trade' is a little unfortunate; it was, of course, the slave trade, of which we do not now care to be reminded.

413 *I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,*

THIS is

The self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears among the alien corn,

it is the yearning of the home-sick heart of man translated into the music of his dreams; it is for the consolation, not only of those who dwell in 'the great town's harsh, heart-wearying roar' but of all who feel themselves strangers and sojourners in an alien and unintelligible world. For them Innisfree is not a place in Ireland or on any map, but the haven where they would be, where the soul at last shall possess itself in peace.

Words as symbols of thought are utterly inadequate to communicate this or any other deep aspiration of the soul; the 'meaning' here is not fully conveyed in the phrases that give us the pictures of a clay-built shed in its garden by a lake-side; if it were so the verses would be no more significant than 'Mine be a cot beside a hill': it is the music of Yeats that differentiates him from Rogers and gives his poem its power over our souls. Those who read for the outward sense only may quite reasonably object that, men and things being what they are, a hermit's life in an Irish cabin is far less attractive than Rogers's ideal; but those who hear the music will not reason about the sense: they will understand that while Rogers is merely commending to the wealth-weary the attractions of the simple life, Yeats is transporting them by the enchantment of his music into a world where 'the actors are all spirits'. That is the world of pure poetry, into which it is as hard for the rich man to enter as into the Kingdom of Heaven, and in which no man but William Blake ever remained for long. That a poet should visit it, like St. John

‘in the spirit on the Lord’s Day’, and then get money, to spend in Bond Street, for communicating his vision to us, is part of the inscrutable mystery of this our life. Some have sought to explain it by a theory of inspiration: the poet speaks, like Balaam’s ass, by the visitation of a power not his own. For others, like William Morris, there is nothing finally mysterious about either his power or his message: he is simply the skilled craftsman of language who can intoxicate us with words as a distiller with whisky, and whose ‘spiritual world’ is as unreal and artificial as a spirituous one. They would solve the mystery of the Innisfree music by an analysis of its sounds and the discovery that syllables containing *l*, the most melodious of consonants, have been consistently selected to produce an effect alike of lingering sweetness in the music and, judiciously combined with *r*’s, of murmuring water,

A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

They would point to the obvious alliteration in the famous tenth line and its no less unmistakable sound-effect, and would go on to call attention to the choice of syllables with long vowels and to their grouping in twos and threes as the means by which the pace of the poem is slowed down to an appropriate gravity, and to the reinforcement of this device by the effect of grouped consonants, *ld-th*, *d-gl*, *ng-sl*, *nts-gr*.

They would point, too, to the use made of suggestion, in the choice of images having associations of natural or literary charm and therefore the power to enlist our prejudices in their favour, the garden furnished with bees, the fireside cricket, and the linnet whose name is as delightful as himself.

But the artist who knew all these things best put before them all 'the eternall Spirit who sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his Altar. . . .'

416 *Thus said The Lord*

'If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent Him'; Mr. Kipling has thought it necessary to invent a God to meet the supposed tastes of the more ignorant of those who go down to the sea in ships and do their business in the great waters. It is probable that Mr. Kipling knows less than he supposes of the souls of men and angels.

Nevertheless the words are fine words, full of sound and fury; and if we chant them *ore rotundo*, like a choir-boy singing Latin, without inquiring too closely into the connexion between the images, we shall get no small satisfaction out of the exercise. 'He that bits the thunder when the bull-mouthed breakers flee', for instance, sounds like a delirious recollection of the Book of Job, and would have delighted Mr. Polly and his colleagues; so 'once we frapped a ship and she laboured woundily' wakens our youthful memories of the delightfully violent seamen in *The Black Arrow*, and we do not stay to consider whether the diction is quite in the style of St. Paul. Indeed, such is the momentum of the verse, with its frequent leaping anapaests and its constant alliteration, that we are hurried to the end without observing that only in the most illiterate mouths does *Lord* rhyme with *broad*; but not, it may be hoped, without noting that 'Thy trumpets tore the sea' is one of those magical phrases which remind us that, however recklessly and riotously he may use the gift, Mr. Kipling is one of the greatest masters of language in the history of our literature.

417 *God of our fathers, known of old,*

THE best-known and one of the most characteristic of Mr. Kipling's poems, but not representative of the little group which will make him loved and honoured by a more civilized posterity. This is, after all, the rhetoric of the priests of Baal; and, to generations that have lost the secret of our word-music together with our militarism, will be but the howling of the barbarian. What this poem has that will never be lost so long as men are mortal is a sense of the transitoriness of human things: but Mr. Kipling has expressed that far more movingly in a nameless lyric beginning 'Cities and Thrones and Powers' which, when 'Recessional' is as forgotten as 'Rule Britannia', will continue to thrill the hearts of men by its wistful loveliness.

Yet to some moods of men to-day 'Recessional' does give eloquent and moving expression. For most of us were brought up in the Jewish belief that our God is a God of Battles who will help us to destroy our enemies, if we trust Him—and keep our powder dry, and if we are mindful to admit *non nobis Domine*. There are indications that the next generation will 'manage without that hypothesis'. But in the meantime the popularity of 'Recessional' is easily explained; it helps us to feel brave yet not bellicose, warlike yet righteous, and so helps us to reconcile our patriotism with our professions of Christianity and to make us feel good. Besides these advantages it has the high poetic merit of fine verbal music, deep-toned, stately, commanding; the first stanza, for instance, reminds us of some great-voiced medieval herald proclaiming the names and titles of his sovereign, 'mouthing out his hollow oes and aes'. The numerous open vowels, indeed, demand and give scope to a fine, deep-chested voice, one that can give full

weight to the heavy *d*'s and adequate vibration to the *f*'s and *r*'s, one, too, which can render the effect of diminished sound without diminution of power in the closed vowels, dentals, and sibilants of the concluding line, and so produce an impressive contrast.

That such music as this should be 'set to music' and more often sung than said is a proof of our utter insensibility to verbal melody.

Alliteration has seldom been used with more impressive effect; besides its rather over-obvious use in initials, there is a secondary and more subtle alliteration of terminal sounds: we cannot miss the *p*'s in *palm* and *pine*, for example, but we may easily fail to hear the musical echo of the *m* and *n* of *dominion*, and so miss the secret of a great line—or part of its secret; for it is great also by virtue of its concentrated power: it gives us in two words the vision which cost Ruskin two of his most highly-wrought pages (in the chapter on the Nature of Gothic, in *The Stones of Venice*). Such magic, by which a phrase has the virtue of an enchanter's spell to flash a vision before us in a moment of time, is the gift of great poets and of them alone. 'Reeking tube and iron shard' is another illustration of the suggestive power of a magic phrase; it concentrates the images of all the battlefields since gunpowder was invented. And after we have noted that *reeking* combines an appeal to the senses of sight, smell, and perhaps even of hearing and taste, that *tube* suggests all the varied kinds of guns, and *shard* every sort of bomb and shell, we are left with the feeling that the whole is infinitely more than the sum of the parts, that the thing is a verbal miracle and beyond explanation. So, too, is the collocation of *vahant* with *dust*: the epithet is the last we should have thought of; yet we recognize it instantly for the very perfection of expression.

From all eternity these two words have waited to come together, and Mr. Kipling has paired them to make a sorcerer's charm, a Word of Power that moves us with a sense of the deep pathos of humanity, doomed yet defiant. That phrase, at least, should move remote posterity as it moves us.

418 *My windows open to the autumn night,*

AN academic exercise illustrating the effect of skilful alliteration. The repeated *m*'s and *s*'s give the verse a smooth flow as of a 'current that with gentle murmur glides', appropriate to the idea of waters on a starry night. Further revision might have eliminated the slight blemish in the sixth line, where the word *sea* not only clashes with *be* but awkwardly repeats the sound of the final rhyme.

The thought is ingenious but not profound; for no one now relies on the Book of Revelation for the topographical details of the next world. And so the pious thought fails to come home to our business and our bosoms, and does not deeply disturb us as Swinburne's 'Star nor sun shall waken' does in 'The Garden of Proserpine' (No. 393).

The title, with its discordant sound, is strangely unfortunate.

419 *With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,*

THE poem is a notable illustration of the attempt made by some living poets to employ free rhythms in the structure of their verse, and so to combine the force of natural utterance with the beauty of an artificial pattern. That, in some measure, has always been done instinctively by every fine poet to avoid the monotony that would result from an unchanging succession of exactly similar feet; good verse, that is, has always been the result of an

accommodation between the claims of natural rhythm and a rigid pattern of alternating strong and weak stresses; when the latter is too much in evidence the verse lacks power, and fails to move us; when it is absent the words may move us, like the crying of a woman, but only through our more primitive emotions: to fear, but not to awe; to wonder, but not to reverence; to anger, but not to indignation; to pleasure, but not to joy.

The effect will terminate in our emotions and will fail to make us conscious of our higher spiritual powers; for these, which we believe we share with the Creator, can only be engaged when we become conscious of a sense of design. Not when 'the earth was without form and void' but when it had taken shape under the Creative Will was it seen and declared to be good: and so it is with poetry. Natural expression is but its raw material, some inherently beautiful like virgin gold, most crude and featureless, but all needing to be worked upon and reshaped in order to become a perfectly efficient means of communicating fullness of truth and beauty.

Poetry is made of words as architecture is made of stones; but in both arts the effect depends absolutely upon the existence of a recognizable design to which all the parts are seen to conform; *vers libre*, so called, is no more poetry than a cairn is architecture.

Mr. Binyon has therefore begun by selecting a fixed pattern into which his phrases shall arrange themselves; its structure demands that his matter shall be grouped into equal sections of four lines of which the first three shall be of the same length and the fourth shorter, and in which the end sounds of the third and fourth lines shall rhyme together. This arrangement satisfies our instinctive demand for a predetermined design yet allows ample scope

within its limits for a great variety of free rhythms. 'They went with songs to the battle, they were young', for example, would have gone into no pattern of English verse, since the blank verse of Shakespeare; taken by itself it has the natural rhythm of prose. Yet it fits this verse-form perfectly, and by doing so gains the added effectiveness, the increased emotional appeal, which words *sung* have over words merely *said*: for an essential consequence of a recognizable rhythmic pattern is an instinctive tendency in the reader to adopt a consciously more musical utterance than that of ordinary speech. The misguided efforts of schoolmasters to resist this natural instinct have done more than anything else to destroy our enjoyment of verse.

Yet without such a heightened rendering this poem will fail of its effect on the rising generation, 'who knew not Joseph'; for whom 'the dead across the sea' are as much the dead of Blenheim or Poitiers as of Ypres; its statements, coldly read, will leave them as cold as a statement of the casualties at Crécy leaves ourselves. It all happened a long time ago and a long way away: and who knows how much of it is true? Even the noblest stanza, the fourth, will seem to them but idle words unless and until its music has thrilled them with its deep-toned cadences, as the ballad of 'Chevy Chase' stirred the heart of Sir Philip Sidney. Then and then only the miracle of the Last Trumpet will be accomplished, and the dead shall live again.

LINE 14. In order to avoid a clash with the rhyming syllable *them* should be spoken with the faintest of vowels, *th'm*.

420 *Sweet Stay-at-home, sweet Well-content,*

MUSIC and images alike suggest a faint reflection of Marvell's 'Remote Bermudas' (No. 114). The theme,

too, derives from the pregnant saying of Carlyle that 'a loving heart is the beginning of all knowledge'. That is also the theme of Mr. Kipling's 'A Charm', but the greater poet has understood it better and has realized, like Wordsworth in the last stanzas of 'Peel Castle' (No. 276), that love and knowledge react upon each other. Mr. Davies takes rather the view of the housewife disappointed with her servant, 'I did think she was honest, for she could neither read nor write'.

The rhyme of line 14 has an unfortunate suggestion of the speech of illiterate London.

421 Of all the trees in England,

ALMOST as magical as Mr. Kipling's 'Tree Song' in its power to make things 'come alive', to invest them with personality, and to make us conscious of new and intimate relations, of the thrill of newborn enthusiasm. The poet speaks as one who has fallen in love; and we fall in love in sympathy, and

Of our love create the earth,
And see that it is good.

The myth of Daphne has become a prophecy, and we are conscious that there are beings 'in the green leaves, among the groves', with which our own spirits are in some subtle communion. But Mr. De la Mare's poem must be reinforced by the incantation of Mr. Kipling's before that miracle is completely wrought.

422 Far are the shades of Arabia,

'MESOPOTAMIA! Ah, that's a blessed word.' The old lady who believed so felt intuitively the truth upon which any philosophy of art must finally rest, that what is beautiful must also be good. 'Arabia', too, for those who have not, in Tagore's

epigram, exchanged the world for a course of commercial geography, is a word of magical beauty; abracadabra may do for common conjurers but not for a great enchanter like Mr. De la Mare—its poverty of vowel sound is too apparent; *his* charm runs up and down the vowel scale and brings us back sweetly and easily to the note on which we began. And at the sound of the Word of Power—behold! the horses of Ishmael and the Princes thereof.

Not, however, the pale princes of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*: no spell at Mr. De la Mare's command could materialize them. He can make us dream, but he cannot disturb us by a feeling that only when we thus dream are we really awake to realities, though, indeed, in 'The Listeners' he does come near to the ultimate achievement of poetry. But, in 'Arabia', the spectators, as Johnson said of Shakespeare's audiences, are in their senses all the time; they are charmed, in the true sense of the word, but not rapt; their wits are not really stolen away, but only for the moment anaestheticized. We 'come to', and are our old selves. But he that has visited Keats's elfingrot, like True Thomas and the Wedding Guest, is never quite the same man thereafter.

As I have known this poem introduced to children by means of a map of Asia it may be needful to say that Mr. De la Mare's Arabia is that Arabia Felix which is also called Beulah and will be found only on the map which shows Stevenson's Land of Counterpane and the Land of Heart's Desire.

The repetition of sound in the opening words of the poem has been criticized as a blemish: as reasonably might the opening of the Dead March in *Saul* be objected to. The repetition has the arresting effect appropriate to the first words of an incantation.

The penultimate line in each stanza affords a

good illustration of the effective introduction of free rhythm; beauty is gained by variety, and power by the natural sweep of the phrasing.

423 *Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode,*

‘DULCE est desipere in loco.’ To observe that Rye was never a Roman settlement is as irrelevant as the objection that a drunken man ceases to be funny when he falls asleep in a ditch; one might as well question the sincerity of the tears of the Walrus and the Carpenter. Mr. Chesterton, like them, and his own drunkard, is suffering from a surfeit: he has been to a feast of languages and exhilarated himself with the heel-taps; and this ebullition is due to what the young footman in *Dombey* called ‘his exciseman’. There is an R in Roman and an R in Rye, a B in Bannockburn and a B in Brighton, and Mr. Chesterton, ‘being a little intoxicates in his prains, did, in his ales, and his angers, look you’, find in this sufficient reason to associate them together. After all, the reason, if not sufficient, is sound; for it rests on the truth discovered by our earliest poets that alliteration is of the very warp and woof of our language, so natural a gratification to our ears that it can make even nonsense attractive.

And yet, ‘in vino veritas’. A wiser word was never spoken by the soberest of philosophers than the aphorism Mr. Chesterton throws off so lightly in his closing couplet.

424 *I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,*

THOUGH Mr. Masfield’s loveliest poems, e.g. ‘C.L.M.’, ‘Twilight’, ‘Beauty’, ‘The Dead Knight’, are not concerned with the sea, he does in some of his lyrics, like ‘Posted as Missing’, ‘Cargoes’, and ‘An

Old Song Re-Sung', succeed in communicating to us the thrill of

The beauty and the mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.

This, however, though one of his best known lyrics, is not among that imperishable few.

This sea fever is only a boy's ailment. We all sympathize of course, as we sympathize with young Crusoe. But it is only when Crusoe is a grown man, alone on his island, that his personality becomes significant to us as a revelation of our own. To all but the very young, 'Third Mate', to say nothing of 'Posted as Missing', will be far more moving and convincing than 'Sea Fever' as an interpretation of our feelings about the sea. And those in whom the lure of the 'old, grey, widow-maker' has outlived their youth shall see the desire of their heart and be satisfied in 'D'Avalos's Prayer', beside which 'Sea Fever' is as the love-sickness of Romeo to the passion of Othello.

'Sea Fever' has been set to music, and makes a good song. Moreover, it loses little in the process, for it has no significant rhythms that might be broken up in singing: it has nothing like

So she passed, swaying, where the green seas run,
in which we are made to feel the very poise and motion of the vessel; it has not even the more easily achieved onomatopoeia of

All the sheets are clacking, all the blocks are whining,
or,

The mumbling, grumbling, humble-bees ;
still less the thrilling cadence of
Twilight it is, and the far woods are dim, and the rooks
cry and call

It is a pretty poem; but not Homer—nor immortal Masfield.

425 *Yes. I remember Adlestrop—*

IT is one of the essential functions of art, as Tennyson noted, to give us a sense of something abiding in the transient; in reality there is no present, it is past as we think of it. But art has power to arrest the flying moment and fix it permanently, to create something of which we are able to say, 'this was, is, and shall be', and so to reassure us that the hunger for eternity which we share with Coleridge is not a vain instinct. Art knew, long before philosophy began to suspect, that Time has no real existence but is a creation of man's mind, while Beauty is one of the attributes by which we apprehend the Eternal. Like the E of *ἐμὶ* on the façade of the temple at Delphi, art affirms of the Eternal, 'THOU ART', the designation, as Plutarch wrote, 'which is true and has no lie in it, and alone belongs to him and to no other, that of BEING. For we have, in fact, no part in real being: all mortal nature is in a middle state between becoming and perishing'.

Adlestrop is an attempt to immortalize a moment's experience, to say to us of a certain spot in Gloucestershire at a certain point in time 'For ever shalt thou love, and she be fair'. But it is doubtful if it is a successful attempt. It is emphatic, with its curt, staccato phrasing; but it is not therefore impressive and memorable, for the words are commonplace; except the name of the station and the trees and flowers they have no charm of melody or magic of rhythm to haunt us after they have trembled into silence. That the details selected are also commonplace would be no objection if they were given a new significance for us, if they were transfigured by being shown to us as we had never yet seen them; but it is only in the third stanza that we are helped to look at the scene with a poet's eye and to see the grouping and the light and shade

of the landscape repeated in the massing of the dappled sky. We who know Adlestrop will look for that when we next visit it. All the rest a camera would show us; we may admire the minuteness of detail as we admire the exact reproduction of a scene in a cinema, because we have seen it all before. But a work of art, unlike a photograph, should show us what we have never learned to look for, not the facts, but a beautiful interpretation of them. Art is revelation, not reproduction; and it is not the thing itself but his vision of it of which an artist can say with assurance

So long as man can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

426 *Too soothe and mild your lowland airs*

THE theme is that of the most moving of all the psalms: 'By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept; when we remembered thee, O Sion'. It appeals to an instinct in us so old that we share it with our dogs and homing pigeons. The restlessness that accompanied the development of transport facilities has made our generation particularly conscious of it; and the poets, whose function is to show us the desires of our hearts, to 'reveal what is our need', have found in it the inspiration of nearly all the verse by which our age will be known to posterity. One of the loveliest lyrics of the Poet Laureate, 'The Hill beside the Thames', the best-known of Rupert Brooke's poems, the most moving of Mr. Belloc's, and the most convincing verse of nearly all our minor poets of to-day express the deeply-felt consciousness, 'felt in the blood and felt along the heart', that

God gave all men all earth to love,
But, since our hearts are small,
Ordains for each one spot shall prove
Beloved over all.

A conviction of absolute sincerity is here our most deeply felt demand; any suspicion of rhetoric is even more fatal to this than to other kinds of love-poetry. Simplicity is therefore its most marked characteristic; it is significant that the best in this kind, the poems that give us the rapture of a religious experience and make us feel that we stand on holy ground, Mr. Belloc's 'I shall go without Companions', and 'The South Country', and Mr. Kipling's 'Sussex', contain scarcely a word that was not used by our forefathers a thousand years ago.

'Margaret's Song' obviously seeks to attain this simplicity, and therefore does not wholly achieve it. *Soothe* has come by taking thought and not as the inevitable word; its strangeness arouses our suspicions; and when we challenge it it can give no very satisfactory account of itself; it merely repeats the meaning of *mild*, and, which is worse, the sound of *too*. When Tennyson tells us of a bare wood 'that grides and clangs' we do not notice the strangeness of *grides*, for it is so obviously the perfect expression that we never dream of challenging it. But *soothe* first puzzles, and then offends us by its preciousness. Rhetorical, too, are mists that are tangible enough to have a grasp, recalling the art of Frankenstein rather than that of Prospero: they are made by ingenuity, not magic. Only the last two lines have the appeal of absolute sincerity; they are the modern equivalent of 'Oh! that I had wings like a dove; then would I flee away, and be at rest'.

428 *We who with songs beguile your pilgrimage*

WHAT immediately strikes one here is the extraordinary echo of the characteristic music of Mr. Masfield's narrative verse; this quatrain from 'Dauber' is but one of hundreds that might be

quoted from Mr. Masfield in illustration for those who have ears to hear:

Then in the sunset's flush they went aloft,
And unbent sails in that most lovely hour.
When the light gentles and the wind is soft,
And beauty in the heart breaks like a flower.

That the form is identical is utterly irrelevant: all our poets have used this instrument, from Chaucer downwards; yet every authentic poet has played upon it his own tune—compare a quatrain from 'Lucrece' or the sonnets with one from the 'Elegy' or from an Ode of Keats, for example; the result will provide a sufficient answer to those who complain that metre is a restraint upon original expression. But here we have the opposite phenomenon: two poets playing upon the same instrument and producing a music so similar that a stanza of the one might be inserted into a poem of the other without a challenge to the most sensitive ear.

It is, of course, the haunting quality in its music that gives the 'Golden Journey' its power to charm; by virtue of that it may last as long as Mr. Masfield's narrative poems, though not as long as his greater lyrics. Beside them it is but the crooning of a cradle song whose monotony charms because it lulls instead of stimulates. But as these are not the best stanzas in the 'Golden Journey', neither is it the best of Flecker's work. It is not impossible that 'To a Poet a Thousand Years hence' may actually be read by a poet at that date.

429 *When you are old, and I—if that should be—*

A GOOD example of what may be accomplished by taste and scholarship alone. Nowadays only professed men of letters seem to have the art of turning a graceful verse; a hundred years ago such an accomplishment was a part of every gentleman's

social equipment. But there was then no ludicrous pretence at a practical education, and every gentleman knew 'the best that had been thought and said in the world'; the masterpieces of literature were a part of the texture of his thought, and when he needed to express himself, their unconscious influence gave point and polish to his style.

'After Ronsard' well represents the old tradition of scholar-made verse. It is not only after Ronsard but after the best of our English poets too, after Shakespeare, and Mr. Yeats, and Rupert Brooke, and Christina Rossetti; and, which is more, intuitively selective of what is best in each.

The sonnet is of the true Shakespearian model in which the theme develops continuously for twelve lines and is summed up epigrammatically in the concluding couplet, cf. Nos. 4, 18, 30, and, particularly, No. 48, in this collection. Many of the lines too have the right Shakespearian cadence, unmistakable even when heard as an echo of an echo. line 3, for example, recalls Christina Rossetti's (No. 382)

When you no more can hold me by the hand;
and that reminds us of Keats's (No. 199):

When I have fears that I may cease to be;
and that, in turn, of Shakespeare; so line 1 suggests Mr. Yeats's:

When you are old, and grey, and full of sleep,
which reproduces the rhythm of

When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang;
and line 2 suggests the thought in the corresponding line of Rupert Brooke's 'Soldier' expressed in the rhythm of

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth.
So to preserve the traditions of the best English poetry is a better thing than to essay the cheap originality of the free-verse school.

430 *If I should die, think only this of me:*

‘Ah! but if a man is part of and is rooted in one steadfast piece of earth, which has nourished him and given him his being, and if he can on his side lend it glory and do it service (I thought), it will be a friend to him for ever, and he has outflanked Death in a way.’ So Mr. Belloc, musing over a stray rhythm that came by chance into his mind,

and therefore even youth that dies
May leave of right its legacies,

found a text and wrote on it a poem¹ which was to be the inspiration of Rupert Brooke’s most famous lines. ‘The way in which our land and we mix up together and are part of the same thing sustained me’, he tells us; and we can see for ourselves how the thought sustained the younger poet in turn.

The war, which revived at once the virtues of paganism and its materialistic creed, made the pupil’s poem far more popular than his master’s; men could accept his vague conception of human survival as ‘a pulse in the eternal mind’ more readily than the mysticism of Mr. Belloc’s

Native ghosts return, and these
Perfect the mystery of the trees.

The circumstance of Brooke’s death, too, invested his poem with an almost prophetic awe for the generation that knew him.

It represents the high-water mark of the war-poetry. But the best poetry of war is not written in war-time.

431 *Everyone suddenly burst out singing;*

A GOOD illustration of the impressiveness that may be gained by the careful selection of the free rhythms of natural speech. The perfect spontaneity

¹ In *The Four Men*.

of the opening line, starting on a heavy down-beat and wonderfully expressing in its rhythm the sensory effects of its image, instantly arrests us, and prepares us to listen 'with appropriate emotions'. And the equally impressive last line ensures that we shall go on listening when the song has ended. This is one of the ultimate tests of a fine poem, that we are able to say of it

The music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more.

432 *At Quincey's moat the squandering village ends,*

GOLDSMITH is but poorly represented in the *Golden Treasury*, and Crabbe not at all. The pleasure we get from these charming lines should send us back to their source in *The Deserted Village* and in the long neglected poetry of Crabbe, who wrote, like Mr. Blunden:

Of Village Life, and every care that reigns
O'er youthful peasants and declining swains;
What labour yields, and what, that labour past,
Age, in its hour of languor, finds at last.

But the two eighteenth-century poets, though they profess to write of villages, are more concerned with the inhabitants than with their environment; Mr. Blunden, calling his poem 'Almswomen', gives us a better picture of an almshouse than of those who live in it. He convinces us of his intimate personal knowledge of the one—for how else could he have learnt about the *steeping* hollyhocks, where else could he have counted the tips of Esau's fingers or discovered the resemblance to a doll's house, and the delight of the poor in oleographic representations of royalty? But of the inhabitants only the linnet is recognized with such absolute certainty: we know him; and we know too that we have been waiting until now to hear our impression of him perfectly expressed. But it is easier to look into an almshouse than into

the soul of an almswoman. For this Crabbe had better opportunities than most poets, and his picture in *The Parish Register* convinces us more than Mr. Blunden's. Our own experience leads us to suspect that in reality each of these old ladies hopes and believes that she will outlive the other, and that when at last they are parted the survivor will find a ready consolation in the reflection, 'Now, thank God, I shall have the bed to myself'.

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